

# Oriental Bird Club



Bulletin 32 • December 2000

# The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

- encourage an interest in the birds of the Oriental Region and their conservation
- liaise with and promote the work of existing regional societies
- collate and publish material on Oriental birds

Two bulletins and a journal, *Forktail*, are published annually.

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## Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and for 2000 costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

## OBC Email Address

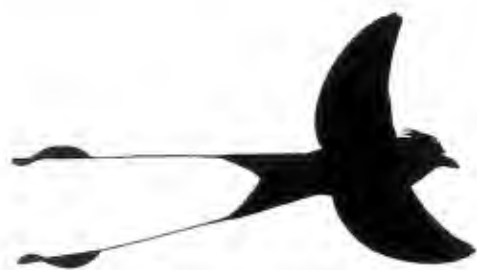
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## OBC Web Site

<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/>

## Cover illustration:

Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini* photo by Chang Shou-hua



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# Letter from the Chairman

*Nigel Collar*



## Oriental Bird Club

24 October 2000

HE the Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary  
Royal Thai Embassy  
29-30 Queen's Gate  
London SW7 5JB

### GURNEY'S PITTA

Your Excellency

I have the honour to present to you, with this letter, a petition raised in August this year by the Oriental Bird Club (OBC) and signed by 3,500 people expressing their deep concern at the continuing plight of Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* in your country. This bird is, by common consent, one of the most beautiful alive today on our planet. It is also one of the most threatened: just 26 individuals remain at Khao Nor Chuchi in southern Thailand, the only site in the world where the species is known to survive.

For the past 15 years efforts have been made to establish an inviolate reserve for the species at Khao Nor Chuchi. External support for this work has included a major international project from the Danish aid agency DANCED. However, a detailed site management plan has languished, and the committee overseeing its implementation has not met. Moreover, the most important forest where the pittas live remains outside the existing reserve, and each year it diminishes in size through local cutting pressure. OBC therefore urgently appeals to your government to ensure (1) that the Krabi provincial administration implement the existing Khao Nor Chuchi Management Plan and activate the Management Steering Committee, and (2) that the Royal Forest Department fully protect the forest under its control and join with the Krabi provincial administration in support of the Management Plan.

OBC draws its membership from around the world. The 3,500 people who signed the petition—many of them distinguished names in the field of conservation—are for the most part not members but concerned citizens who likewise cannot tolerate the idea of such an exquisite animal being lost to the world forever. They, in turn, represent millions of people on this planet who will cry out in dismay and despair if Thailand, which alone has the power and responsibility in the matter, fails to save this bird.

Meanwhile, OBC pledges to work tirelessly for the conservation of Gurney's Pitta, and to extend the hand of friendship to the people of Thailand in this endeavour.

Yours faithfully

Dr. N. J. Collar  
Chairman, Oriental Bird Club

Oriental Bird Club, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, UK  
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# Club News



## Derek Holmes

We greatly regret to report that Derek Holmes, driving force behind the Ornithological Society of Indonesia and editor of its journal *Kukila*, died suddenly in Bandung, Java, on 3 October. A full obituary will appear in the spring *Bulletin*. Oriental ornithology has lost one of its most devoted advocates, and all who knew Derek, or knew of his tireless work to produce *Kukila*, will appreciate the magnitude of this loss.

## Reports of recent Club meetings and events:

### First OBC Meeting in Newcastle, June 2000

Thanks to the initiative and persuasive powers of former Council member Adrian Pitches who both organised and compered the meeting, the Orient went to the North East on June 24. About 50 people attended the first joint meeting of the OBC with the Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club in the Claremont Building of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Those present at the all-

day event enjoyed talks on a wide range of topics. OBC Chairman Nigel Collar lead off with 'Threatened Birds of Asia', and he was followed by Pamela Rasmussen of the Smithsonian Institution on 'Asian Owls: new discoveries and rediscoveries'. During the break for lunch, participants had the opportunity to examine the Hancock Museum's impressive collection of bird skins and our thanks go to Eric Morton and Les Jessop of the Hancock for hosting the visit. The afternoon session saw OBC Secretary and NTBC member Brian Sykes cover 'Goa - Gateway to the Orient' and finally BBRC and NTBC member Jimmy Steele entertained with 'Oriental Birds & the British List'. Thanks go to OBC's Margaret Sykes for the catering and Nick Rossiter of NTBC for acting as projectionist. WildSounds provided a good selection of books and other items. The following day a few hardy souls ventured to the Farne Islands and enjoyed first class views of the seals and nesting seabirds.

### British Bird Watching Fair, August 2000

The OBC stand at the 2000 Bird Fair focused exclusively on the plight of Gurney's Pitta and the OBC Campaign to save it. 'Giant' Gurney's



Graham Wynne



Bill Oddie

Pitta boards were used as the platform for signatures from visitors. We filled three boards during the three days, a total of around 3,500 signatures! A number of well known people from the birding world signed the giant Gurney's Pitta and wished our campaign well, including Baroness Young of Old Scone, Graham Wynne, Bill Oddie, Tony Soper, and BBWF organisers Tim Appleton and Martin Davies. Rumours that OBC Secretary Brian Sykes was nearly thrown off site for soliciting dressed in a 'Save Gurney's Pitta' sandwich board are completely true. The petition was delivered to the Royal Thai Embassy on 24 October by Chairman Nigel Collar supported by other members of OBC Council.

The OBC 2000 Prize Draw was also dedicated to the 'Save Gurney's Pitta' campaign and our prize draw ticket sellers managed to collect £2100 in ticket sales over the three days, the best total ever and easily surpassing the 1999 figure. Special thanks go to volunteers Freda Eden (once again the star ticket sales person), Richard Eden, Charles Durman and Vicky Harley. Our Chairman Nigel Collar found out at first hand how hard the volunteers work when he spent 3 days of his 'holidays' working on the stand. Thank you, Nigel!

Gurney's Pitta pin badges and new 'Save Gurney's Pitta' T-shirts (designed for the Club by Kamol Komolphalin) were on sale (see new T-shirt designs), as well as the new OBC 'logo' T-shirts and sweatshirts. Almost 30 new members were recruited, and several lapsed members took the opportunity to rejoin the Club. Our thanks go to all the members who visited the stand and picked up their copy of *Forktail* 16. Many of them also spent money on prize draw tickets and Club sales items.

The report on the Bird Fair cannot ignore the other high profile OBC contribution to the event — the second 'Conservation Cup' five-a-side soccer tournament! Brought back at the request of last year's participants and supported by BBWF management, Marcus Kohler again organised the event single-handed. Appeals to the Club membership in Bulletin 31 for players brought only one volunteer — John Knight. Thank you for turning out! Sadly, the OBC team did not shine - for the second year the propaganda outstripped the performance! Only when it was too late did the team play to its full potential in the last game of the group competition! The final was a repeat of 1999 with the BTO and RSPB contesting the hard-fought, tough-tackling affair which ended

goal less even after extra-time. The RSPB finally took the trophy and the prize by narrowly winning the penalty shoot-out 3-2. In addition to the indefatigable Marcus, who scored the OBC goals (including one for RSPB) as well as organising everything, thanks go to former Council member Mike Blair for his impeccable, impartial refereeing, to Mike Edgecombe for organising equipment, and to Jane Kohler for understanding the immensely complicated scoring system and thereby keeping track of the group tables.

### **OBC Blakeney Meeting, August 2000**

This year's OBC Blakeney meeting was held on August 27 and it was as successful as ever with numbers attending holding up well compared with recent years. The first talk, 'Birds of Beidaihe', was given by Tony Marr. Tony's slides illustrated the way 'development' is overtaking the area, although fortunately the birds continue to show up in good numbers. Sustained by a first helping of Dick Filby's legendary curry we then moved onto new ground thanks to Axel Bräunlich who gave a great talk on Mongolia, with stunning sky and landscapes as well as new and exciting birds. After an update on the Gurney's Pitta situation there was a new departure when Mike Edgecombe presented the first OBC Video Quiz. Most of those present found this quite challenging and determined to do better next year!

After the Video Quiz, the OBC 2000 Mega Prize Draw was made. The winner of the superb Leica APO Televid 77 telescope donated by Leica, was Mr Pendlebury of Wakefield. The second prize was a copy of *Handbook of the Birds of the World* Volume 5, donated by Lynx Edicions. This was won by the wife of member David Nelson, whilst several other Club members were among the winners of runner up prizes. Once again Council would like to take the opportunity to thank all the donors of the prizes which make the draw such a success; Leica, Lynx Edicions, A & C Black, New Holland, OUP, Pica Press and WildSounds. The day finished with a B-B-Q, another OBC 'first'. Almost 40 members and friends stayed on even though the rain started on cue, just as 'man of the day' Dick Filby was putting the food on the grill! The turn out was sufficiently encouraging to plan a repeat in 2001.

Thanks to the speakers, Duncan Macdonald for the organisation (and to the WildSounds team for the books and tapes on sale), Mike Edgecombe for the quiz, and the ladies who helped with the refreshments throughout the day. Special thanks

as always to Dick Filby who showed us that his talents are not confined to curry, but include a mean hand on the barbie! All we need for 2001 is to teach him to control the weather.....

### OBC Stand at Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting

Thanks to Axel Bräunlich, OBC Representative for Austria & Germany, the OBC had a stand at this meeting which was held in Leipzig 19–25 September. Over 500 people attended the event including many ornithologists from Eastern Europe, the CIS and Mongolia. Talks and discussions featured various aspects of research and conservation in the extended OBC region. At least 10 new members were recruited. Several German OBC members attended and OBC publications and T-shirts sold well. Council's thanks go to Axel for a job well done!

### Announcements:

#### OBC Expedition — Haribon/OBC Expedition setback

After a reconnaissance trip to the study site in the early summer of 2000, the Haribon Foundation (BirdLife Partner in the Philippines) decided that the local community living near the study area would be sensitive to a large-scale expedition operating in their immediate vicinity. Any conservation measures which may be taken at the site will only succeed if they have the full co-operation of the local community and the maintenance of good relations is of paramount importance. Sadly therefore the expedition has been put on hold for the moment. The Club hopes to collaborate with Haribon on a similar venture in the near future. Council's thanks go particularly to Phil Benstead and to all those who applied for positions on the expedition and/or helped in the project planning in any way.

#### OBC Stand at Taipei Bird Fair 2000

The OBC was invited to attend the second annual Taipei Bird Fair on October 28/29. Secretary Brian Sykes represented the Club at this event. A full report will appear in the next Bulletin.

#### Annual General Meeting, London, 9 December 2000

Due to a sequence of events beyond Council's control the AGM has had to move from its time-honoured venue in 2000. This year the AGM is being held at the School of Oriental and African Studies located in Russell Square. This is close to

Euston Road and is served by Goodge Street (Northern Line) and Russell Square (Piccadilly Line) tube stations. Doors will open at 11.00am and there will be the usual full programme of speakers and refreshments. Full information on the AGM was mailed out to all paid-up members during October. In 2001 Council plans to return to the traditional venue.



#### Second World Birding Conference, Swanwick, Derbyshire, 30 March – 1 April 2001

OBC members in Europe and the UK will find a flier/application form for this event enclosed with this Bulletin. The venue is the Hayes Conference Centre at Swanwick, Derbyshire, the same venue as the first World Birding Conference. The inclusive conference fees range from £97 to £150 depending on the type of accommodation required. The programme includes talks on Early Birding Pioneers by Ian Wallace, Recording bird sounds by Richard Ranft, Modern field data collation by Will Cresswell, Important Bird Areas by Melanie Heath and more. There will be a range of stands with books, club displays, optics, sounds, holidays, and in fact almost anything a birder may need. Further information may be obtained from the conference website at: <http://www.wbc2.com> Additional application forms are available from the OBC, please contact the Secretary via 'The Lodge' or email to: [mail@orientalbirdclub.org](mailto:mail@orientalbirdclub.org)

#### Lost, stolen or strayed .....

The Club has lost contact with the three fully paid-up members shown below who are no longer at the last address on the membership database. Would anyone who knows the whereabouts of

Paul Bristow (late of Hampshire), Dr Andrew Greiser Johns (Northants), and Gareth Rees (Cheltenham), please contact the Membership Secretary via 'The Lodge' or email at: [mail@orientalbirdclub.org](mailto:mail@orientalbirdclub.org)

### **'Subscription Renewal Time Again!'**

If your subscription is due for renewal on 1 January 2001, and you do not pay by Bankers Order, a renewal form was sent out with the AGM papers. Please renew right away! Early renewal of your subscription helps the administration and also saves members money. The publications of members who renew late have to be mailed out individually and this is substantially more expensive than by the regular bulk mailing at time of publication, not to mention very time consuming for the Membership Secretary.

### **'Gift Aid'**

This is a new and painless way in which UK members can help the Club. It does not cost you anything and it allows the Club to claim back 28p from the taxman for every £1 of subscription and donation that you make to the Club. A letter about Gift Aid has been sent to all UK members, please read it and sign up. If the majority of the UK membership sign up to the scheme, it will help Council hold down the subscription rate for even longer.

### **Thanks Again!**

The thanks of Council again go to all the members who visited the Club stand — either at the British Bird Watching Fair or Blakeney meeting — and picked up their copy of *Forktail* 16. An even bigger thank you goes to those members from overseas who volunteered to carry *Forktail* back for friends and colleagues. In all about 260 copies were distributed at a saving of almost £500 on mailing cost. Look out for *Forktail* 17 at the 2001 Bird Fair.

### **Donations for conservation**

The thanks of the Club go to Avifauna of Sweden and to Club member Ed Keeble for donations to the conservation fund of £500 each. Thanks go also to the 'Cambs Diehards' bird race team, Richard Patience (captain), Steve Cooper, Alan Hitchings & Club member Jonathan Taylor, who generously donated their prize of £125 won in the Birdwatch UK Bird Race to the OBC conservation fund. Council also sends a very big thank you to the Dutch Birding Association and all their

members who responded to the collection that Dutch Birding made on behalf of the 'Save Gurney's Pitta' fund. The amount raised was a very welcome £285!

### **New OBC T-shirts and Sweatshirt designs**

The new range of T-shirts and sweatshirts featuring the Club 'Forktail' logo and the caption 'Oriental Bird Club' on the left breast were a hit with members visiting the Bird Fair. The T-shirts are available in bottle green, royal blue or teal. The sweatshirts are available in bottle green, royal blue and light grey. The 'Save Gurney's Pitta' T-shirt, featuring a beautiful design by Thai artist Kamol Komolphalin went on sale at the Bird Fair and is now available by mail order. The shirt is produced in unbleached pre-shrunk cotton. Two sizes are available, medium (up to 40" chest) and large (up to 44" chest). The Club also has a second T-shirt designed by Kamol for sale — 'Magical Birds of Thailand', a montage of several of the most beautiful and interesting birds of Thailand. It is also made from unbleached cotton and produced in the same two sizes.

### **New Bulletin Editorial Team appointed**

As many of you will know Richard Thomas is stepping down as OBC Bulletin Editor. Richard recently moved to BirdLife International where he is now editor of *World Birdwatch* and also edits Birdlife's European and African newsletters and the internal newsletter Update. Tim Allwood and Simon Colenutt have stepped into the breach as editor and assistant editor respectively. Simon Colenutt has served on the Committee of the Isle of Wight Ornithological Group since its beginnings in 1985, and has travelled in search of birds in South America, Africa and Asia. He currently works for a Winchester-based ecological consultancy and runs his own ecological consultancy. Tim Allwood has had a lifelong interest in birds which has led to travels in North America, Europe, Africa, Australia and South-east Asia. He has worked for the RSPB and WWT on population surveys and has lived and worked in Indonesia for 18 months. He is currently working as an English Language teacher in Cambridge.

Many thanks to Richard for all his hard work over the years and seamless job as Bulletin editor. Richard remains committed to the OBC and will be supporting the new editorial team.



## Advertise in the OBC Bulletin


Council would like to thank all those organisations advertising regularly in the OBC Bulletin. Advertising helps to offset the cost of production and the benefit to the Club from this is significant. The current standard rate for advertising (black & white) in the Bulletin is: full page £135; half page £85; quarter page £60. Colour advertisements are available at extra cost. If your company or organisation would like to consider advertising please contact: Richard Thomas, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK or by email at: [mail@orientalbirdclub.org](mailto:mail@orientalbirdclub.org)

## Contacting the Club by email

More members are making use of email to contact the Club. The Club email address may be used to notify the Club of address changes, membership renewals, sales orders and general enquiries. Contributions for the Club publications may also be submitted in this way. Please ensure that contributions sent to the Club are virus free. Several documents have had to be returned to the sender without being opened. If you have any

doubts about the system you use, please mail a hard copy as back up. The Club email address is [mail@orientalbirdclub.org](mailto:mail@orientalbirdclub.org) Mail to this address is forwarded to the appropriate Council member for attention.

The Club website continues to maintain a very high standard and Council is very grateful to Alan Wilkinson who masterminds this for us. The website contains information of interest to members and prospective members alike. Members are requested to draw it to the attention of potential new members who need further information about the Club. The Club website address is <http://www.orientalbirdclub.org> Members are also reminded about 'orientalbirding' the email discussion group closely associated with the Club. The group, which is moderated by Council member Krys Kazmierczak, continues to flourish and has a membership approaching 600. Many topics are introduced and often create lively discussion. It is free, why not give it a try? To join simply send an email (which may be left blank) to [orientalbirding-subscribe@egroups.com](mailto:orientalbirding-subscribe@egroups.com)



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# Conservation Fund

Compiled by Marcus Kohler with additional contributions from Anny Andaryati, Andy Clements, Mike Crosby, Carol Inskipp and Geoff Hilton.

## CORPORATE SPONSORS

We would like to express our thanks, once again, to Avifauna for supporting another small grant. Avifauna are a professional birding tour operator owned by the Swedish Ornithological Society. More information can be found on their website at: <http://www.sofab.se/avifauna>



Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera* by Craig Robson  
(Courtesy of Birdquest)

## GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Eight new proposals have been reviewed since the last bulletin. We have awarded four new grants and are publishing details of two projects that were delayed in their commencement. We have awarded one grant each in Sri Lanka and India, two in China, and three in Indonesia.

### Ecology of Spot-winged Thrush, Sri Lanka

Kanchana Weerakoon has been awarded a small grant of £500 to continue her valuable study of the Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera*, a Sri Lankan endemic considered near-threatened due to habitat destruction. This is the first survey to be carried out on the species. The aims are to identify territories, to study the species' diet, foraging methods and breeding biology, to identify tree species and determine the ecological parameters (humidity, temperature etc.) within the birds territories. It is hoped that the study will help to understand the degree of disturbance that the species can tolerate and therefore the degree of threat it faces, so ultimately helping to conserve it.

### Avifauna survey in north-east India

A small grant of £500 will contribute towards an extensive survey of birds in the rainforests of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram in north-east India by Ayesgul Birand. Recently there has been much effort to prioritise areas by identifying Important Bird Areas (IBAs), but the effort has been hindered because this region is poorly explored, mainly due to political and logistical restrictions. The main objective of the survey is to document avifauna in the low to mid elevation rainforest for the subsequent identification of IBAs. New distributional records are expected and this effort will help fill information gaps on distribution and diversity patterns in north-east India, providing additional criteria for conservation prioritisation in this region.

## Survey of Grey-sided Thrush in the Dongling mountains, Beijing, China

The threatened Grey-sided Thrush *Turdus feae* breeds in northern China and winters in north-east India and south-east Asia. It has only been recorded from a handful of localities on the breeding grounds, and little information is available on its ecology there. A small grant of £500 has been awarded to Prof. Zhang Zhengwang to investigate its distribution, population density and habitat selection in the Dongling mountains in Beijing municipality. The vegetation has regenerated well in this area since it was afforded some protection in the 1950s, but the forests are now being reduced and fragmented because of development, including the construction of a new road and tourist hotels. This project will gather information on the impacts of these activities and will make recommendations on the conservation actions required to protect the species and its habitats.

## Survey and conservation of Brown Eared Pheasant in the Huanglong mountains, Shaanxi, China

The Brown Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon mautchuricum* is endemic to northern China where it was thought to be confined to Shanxi and Hebei provinces and Beijing municipality. However, in 1998 a population was discovered c.200 km to the west of its known range, in the Huanglong mountains in northern Shaanxi province. A small grant of £500 has been awarded to a team from the provincial Nature Reserve and Wildlife Conservation office, led by Jin Xuelin, to study the distribution and size of the population there, and to investigate its habitat selection in this area. The forests in the Huanglong mountains are being affected by grazing and clearance for cultivation, and the results of the project will be used to develop a conservation plan for this population of Brown Eared Pheasant. We are grateful to Avifauna for sponsoring this project.

# AVIFAUNA

## Conservation education of school children of villages inside and surrounding the Bali Barat National Park, Indonesia



Bali Myna *Leucopsar rothschildi*  
by Craig Robson

A small grant of £500 has been awarded to Elizabeth Laine of Switzerland to conduct an environmental awareness project in villages adjacent to Bali Barat National Park, the last remaining habitat of the Bali Myna *Leucopsar rothschildi*. Ms Laine has undertaken some bird related research in the area and noticed that there is a lack of conservation awareness programmes for the communities. Ms Laine's work is largely self-funded and she will use the grant from OBC to produce education materials, and to work closely with her counterparts from Bali Barat National Park.

The methods used will be varied. Ms Laine, together with her counterparts from the National Park will interview ten families in each village to determine the best education awareness approaches for the children, visit schools in the area, organise meetings with local communities and leaders for their support, and train park guards to continue the project. The project duration will be one year and it will be monitored by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences.

## Identification of waterbird colonies in East Kalimantan, Indonesia

The Ornithology and Wildlife Information Center (LORIES - Lembaga Ornithologi dan Informasi Satwa) received a Small Grant of £500 to conduct 15 days fieldwork to locate waterbird colonies and assess their numbers. The field study will take place in three

locations; Lake Melintang, Lake Semayang and Lake Jempang in East Kalimantan. The total wetland area is 400,000 ha. The lakes are surrounded by herbaceous swamp and freshwater and peat swamp forests. There are several globally threatened species recorded from the area in the past, notably Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi* and Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*. The inaccessibility of the lakes, many of which can be reached only by canoe or wading, means there is little present information on location, size, status and threats to waterbird colonies in this region.

LORIES is an environmental NGO formed in response to a need for information from people who face dramatic changes in their environment and way of life. It facilitates information exchange and provides an avenue in which to learn about and value the natural environment. LORIES works with local communities, research institutes and others to promote the value of natural resources and their long-term management.

### CONSERVATION FUND IN ACTION

We have received four reports; one from Indonesia, and three from India

#### **Bird-based ecotourism development and other current measures in the Togeian Islands, Sulawesi, Indonesia**

Mohamad Indrawan received an OBC small grant in 1998 to undertake two further field visits to the remote Togeian Islands, which lie north of the eastern arm of Sulawesi. These islands are known as a place of outstanding beauty supporting a rich biodiversity, with natural ecosystems ranging from rainforests to mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs. Some of the endemic Sulawesi wildlife that is difficult to see on the mainland, such as the Babirusa *Babirusa babyrussa*, Black-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon melanorhyncha*, and the Sulawesi Hanging Parrot *Loriculus stigmatus*, are relatively easy to see in the Togeians with other important endemic species such as Knobbed Hornbill *Aceros cassidix*, and Blue-crowned Racquet-tail *Prioniturus discurus* also present. The aims of the two trips were to list the birds of the island group, and to integrate wildlife appreciation activities into an existing local program that hinged on the community-based development of ecotourism.

The conservation and development of the islands has been the focus of a group of NGOs for the past five years. A participatory workshop and seminar was held for the area in which it was established that the development of ecotourism was an important priority. This workshop carried considerable political weight bringing together local community leaders, local government agencies and key representatives from the national government (including the Director General for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation and the Assistant Minister for the Environment). The islands have had to manage a rapid increase in international tourists. A NGO works locally in the area to promote ecotourism to increase community income.

The aim of the first field visit was to conduct a workshop on bird identification for the local guides. Nine members of the community who had been trained to be nature guides learned more

about bird identification. As a follow up to the workshop, the trainees undertook bird surveys. The NGO has now adopted bird watching as part of their programme with the help of two pairs of binoculars donated by the RSPB for the project.

The second visit gathered data on logging activities. Some areas were cleared at the beginning of 1995 to create a chocolate plantation. Despite the community's concern, the government has issued logging permits. A two-week field visit was made to observe the impact of this logging and to make recommendations to the government for future steps. A written report was submitted to the government enabling them to revoke the permits if the logging company breaks regulations.

Combined with two other visits undertaken by the author, the surveys have now covered both the northern summer and winter, and have increased the known number of birds in Togeian, from 63 species to 98. Specific distribution over Togeian's major islands (Togeian, Talatakoh, Batudaka, Malenge) was noted. A list was also compiled for the island of Una-Una, where volcanic activities are of special biogeographic interest.

One of the most encouraging results during the course of the two surveys in 1996 and 1997 was the production of a set of recommendations by the Head of Balai (Forest Protection and Nature Conservation Agency) in Central Sulawesi. This called for the better protection of restricted range and threatened species in the Togeian and Banggai island groups. The letter includes specific proposals to give the endemic birds and other threatened vertebrates of the Togeian and Banggai archipelagos stronger legal protection. The letter also pointed out that it has been eight years since the two island groups were proposed for marine and terrestrial conservation areas but official recognition has yet to be issued by the Ministry of Forestry in Jakarta.

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### **Creating conservation awareness in secondary schools in Kerala State, India**

An OBC small grant funded a conservation awareness programme in more than a hundred schools, reaching thousands of students and hundreds of teachers in Kozhikode district, in Kerala. The programme also extended to the general public who have welcomed it enthusiastically. The major component of the campaign is the audio-visual programme for which a hundred transparencies were prepared. The slides include endemic, endangered and extinct species. A brief description of each species emphasising its behaviour and status, as well as songs and calls has been recorded onto audiocassette. Students and teachers have shown much interest in viewing the slides and hearing the birds. They have been trained to identify species' calls and songs. After the slide show a half-hour question and answer session was held for students and an exhibition of coloured drawings helped students in bird identification. Students were asked to draw bird

pictures and colour them appropriately. Another important activity was taking the students birdwatching. They were taught the fundamentals of identification, the importance of making notes and illustrations in the field, how to use field guides and binoculars, and how to find and watch birds. A birdwatchers' club has been formed under the guidance of a teacher who is a bird enthusiast. The campaign has been a great success.

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### **Bird Surveys and Conservation Awareness programme in and around Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary**

A small grant awarded in 1997 permitted Nature's Beckon to conduct a conservation awareness programme and bird survey in the Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary in western Assam. The Chakrashila sanctuary is an important, but poorly known area of primary wet hill forest, which was declared a reserve as recently as 1994.

Between December 1997 and May 1998 a series of participatory meetings with local people was held in seven villages around the sanctuary. These highly successful events aimed to raise awareness of the avifauna of the area, and of the wildlife protection laws with particular emphasis placed on the cultural value of birds. A number of children, students and teachers were trained in bird identification and were taken on field trips into the sanctuary. As a result of the programme poaching appears to have almost ceased in the project area.

In parallel to the awareness-raising work, a series of bird surveys was undertaken in the sanctuary between December 1997 and November 1998. A total of 273 bird species was recorded including five species of pheasant and 26 species of raptor. Species of global conservation concern that were recorded in the area included Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca* (Vulnerable), Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* (Near Threatened), Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus* (Near Threatened), Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* (Vulnerable), Pied Falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos* (Near Threatened), Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* (Near Threatened), Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* (Vulnerable), Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* (Endangered), and Blue-naped Pitta *Pitta nipalensis* (Near Threatened). The project has undoubtedly improved the conservation status of the Chakrashila area by enlisting local support for conservation of the site, while improving knowledge of the bird community.

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# Grey-and-buff Woodpecker *Hemicircus concretus* — notes on juvenile plumages

In August 1999 the German birdpark 'Vogelpark Walsrode' imported two *Hemicircus* woodpeckers, apparently of the subspecies *Hemicircus c. concretus*, as part of a larger delivery of Indonesian birds from Jakarta for a new exhibition. This institution holds one of the largest collections of captive birds in the world. One of them was a seemingly juvenile specimen with a striking cinnamon cap abruptly divided from a fluffy, orange-red, "punk-like" crest. We found no such description in the available modern literature<sup>1-3</sup> and wondered if it could be an undescribed taxon.

The striking Grey-and-buff Woodpecker occurs in the Malay Peninsula and the Greater Sundas in two well differentiated subspecies. *H. c. concretus* has a restricted range in Java, where it is an uncommon inhabitant of lowland wooded areas.<sup>3</sup> It is a very small, compact-bodied woodpecker with a conspicuously short tail. Both sexes are sooty grey with black, heart-shaped markings on the buff tertials and wing coverts. The male has an entirely red crown and crest, whereas females are grey coloured here. Juveniles of both sexes are said to have a buff crown. Short,<sup>1</sup> suggested that some females "...may retain a juvenal red and rufous crown". However, we were reasonably convinced that the woodpecker in question was a juvenile, based on the broad white edges of the wing coverts and tertials and also its behaviour.<sup>3</sup> It was very curious and contact seeking, spending a lot of time calling and even showing begging behaviour; its movements were rather awkward. We contacted authorities in museums known to hold collections of Indonesian birds and apparently specimens matching our bird do exist in collections but are uncommon; e.g. only two specimens in the Natural History Museum, Tring, and none in the Museum für Tierkunde in Dresden. Both Tring specimens were collected on Java, in 1826 and 1856 respectively,

and labelled as juv. males. Hargitt's<sup>4</sup> extensive work on woodpeckers detailed the different characters of the sex and age classes of *H. c. concretus* and *H. c. sordidus*, especially the unmistakable head pattern of juv. male *H. c. concretus*. His description of juvenile male *sordidus*, however, closely matched the illustrations of the recent literature.

We can fully confirm Hargitt's findings as the captive specimen started moulting into adult plumage in January 2000. It is notable that one of the Tring specimens was collected in juv. plumage in December and that the sparse data on breeding biology point to May and June as the breeding season.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, we conclude that confusion has arisen through generalizing the juvenile plumages of the two subspecies and not acknowledging the discoveries made more than a hundred years ago.

We thank and acknowledge the curators S. Eck (Dresden) and F. Steinheimer (Tring) for helpful assistance, and F. Neumann (Walsrode) for drawing our attention to this subject.

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# The breeding site and the conservation of the Black-faced Spoonbill in China

The Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* is a globally threatened species classified as Endangered.<sup>1</sup> In January 1998 a total of 613 were counted,<sup>2</sup> however, the known breeding population is much smaller and the known breeding sites are limited to the West Sea of DPRK.<sup>3</sup> The survey and conservation of potential breeding sites is recommended as urgent in the Action Plan for the species.<sup>4</sup>

On 15th June 1999 a new breeding site was discovered on a small island in the Changshan archipelago in Liaoning province of China.<sup>5</sup> This is the first definite record of breeding in China. Supported by Wild Bird Society of Japan, we returned to the island on 15th July and conducted a survey and a short term study of the species's breeding biology. Here we report some results of the survey.

## The New Breeding Site

Three pairs were found breeding on the tiny island of Xing-Ren Tuo located in the northern part of Changshai Islands in Liaoning province and about 12 km away from the mainland (Fig.1). Xing-Ren Tuo is only 1 ha and there is no freshwater and no people live there. The northwest and southeast sides are steep cliffs and the highest elevation is 43 m. The nests are on the top of the cliffs on the northwest and southeast sides.

## The Avifauna of Xing-Ren Tuo

During the study period, 13 species of birds excluding the Black-faced Spoonbill were seen on Xing-Ren Tuo (Table 1). The most abundant species which also closely associated with the spoonbills were Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*



Fig. 1 The location of Xin-Ren Tuo



which is also globally threatened, Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris* and Herring Gull *L. argentatus*. According to Chong *et al.*<sup>6</sup> in North Korea the eggs of Black-faced Spoonbill eggs were destroyed by Herring Gulls. However, in this breeding season on Xing-Ren Tuo, no egg or chick was damaged by the Gulls.

Table 1. The bird list of Xing-Ren Tuo

Scientific name	English Name	No. of individuals
<i>Phalacrocorax capillatus</i>	Japanese Cormorant	1
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Cattle Egret	1
<i>Egretta eulophotes</i>	Chinese Egret	315
<i>Platalea minor</i>	Black-faced Spoonbill	9(+3)
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Eurasian Oystercatcher	4
<i>Larus crassirostris</i>	Black-tailed Gull	380
<i>L. argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	20
<i>Columba rupestris</i>	Hill Pigeon	12
<i>Upupa epops</i>	Common Hoopoe	1
<i>Apus pacificus</i>	Fork-tailed Swift	20
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	White Wagtail	1
<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Blue Rock Thrush	4
<i>Emberiza fucata</i>	Chestnut-eared Bunting	4

## The Breeding in 1999

According to local people, the birds began breeding on Xing-Ren Tuo in 1998 and two adults and two juveniles were seen standing at the nest and on the reefs nearby in the summer of 1998. In 1999 two birds arrived; in late April and on 1st May. In all, three pairs frequently visited and stayed at Xing-Ren Tuo. Nesting started on 9th May. One nest was a re-used nest on the northwest side of the island (Nest 1). Two other nests were on the southeast side of the island, 3 m apart (Nests 2 and 3). Nest measurement and the date of egg laying are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Nest measurement and the date of egg laying.

	Nest No. 1	Nest No. 2	Nest No. 3
inner diameter (cm)	41 x 29	28 x 23	25 x 23
outer diameter (cm)	90 x 56	67 x 48	55 x 45
depth of nest (cm)	8	3-9	5-8
height of nest (cm)	10-23	10	2-12
year of use	2	1	1
first clutch size	3	3	3
second clutch size	-	3	2
date of egg laying	?	14, 16 & 18, July	16 & 18, July
number of chicks	3	0	0

Nest No.1 bred successfully. Three chicks were hatched on 18th June and the fledged chicks flew from the breeding site aged 46 days on 2nd August.

The first clutches of Nests No.2 and 3 were collected by visitors on 3rd July, but 12 days later the birds started laying a second clutch. After our arrival on 15th July a watch was kept day and night. Copulation was observed at 4:30 am on 18th July, so it is believed that the eggs of the second brood were fertilized. However, four photographers and reporters visited the breeding site on 10th August and subsequently the incubating birds were disturbed many times by visitors and curious locals. Incubation was irregular and after 40 days of incubation (25th August) no chick had hatched.

Besides these three pairs, others also breed in that area. On 18th July another pair was observed on Xing-Ren Tuo and another female was seen on 2nd August. The direction they came from is unknown but both flew towards Yuan-Bao Tuo when leaving. Yuan-Bao Tuo is a c.10 ha island, 3 km south of Xing-Ren Tuo, with a maximum elevation of 73 m. During a two-hour survey there, 220–250 adult Chinese Egrets and 1800–2000 Black-tailed Gulls were counted but Black-faced Spoonbills were not found.

## Conservation

Xing-Ren Tuo is only 1 km away from a large island, Shicheng Island, which has a small town and several villages and a population of more than 5,000. Sea farmers cultivate mussels and fan shells in shallow waters along the coast. In the spring of each year, fishermen and the sea farmers from Shicheng Island visit Xing-Ren Tuo to collect bird eggs for food. They even set fire to the previous year's withered grass in order to find the nests and eggs more easily. They are the main threat to the birds breeding there. Moreover, visitors often go to Xing-Ren Tuo to see the birds, possibly disturbing incubation, and often to collect eggs before leaving. This year, the eggs of the first brood of nests No.2 and 3 were collected.

There are many small islands similar to Xing-Ren Tuo in the Changshan Islands (Fig.1) and their avifauna has not been investigated in recent decades. A wider survey needs to be conducted next year and more breeding sites of the Black-faced Spoonbill and other globally threatened species such as the Chinese Egret may be found.

A report and conservation recommendation were sent to the local government and State Forestry Administration and Xing-Ren Tuo has now been protected by the Forestry Department of Liaoning Province. It is forbidden to go to this island without permission.

## Acknowledgments

This project is supported by the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ). We thank Mr Simba Chan and Prof. Gao Yu-ren for sending us reference materials. Mike Crosby kindly read the manuscript and made comments. Many thanks also to Mr. Zhou Qing-shan and Zhou Qing-ye for assistance with the survey.

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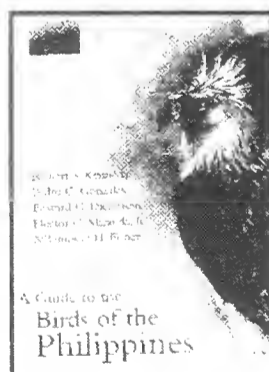


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Adult Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* and Chinese Egrets *Egretta eulophotes* (Photo: Ding Chang-qing)

Juvenile Grey-and-buff Woodpecker *Hemicircus concretus concretus*: see page 13 (Photo: Norbert Bahr)



# Little-known Oriental Bird

## Discovery of a breeding colony of Chinese Crested Terns



Prior to the recent observations detailed below, the Chinese Crested Tern was only known from a few old specimens and sight records. There are a few historical records from China including 21 collected off Shandong in 1937. More recent records from China are of three birds observed on sand flats at Beidaihe on 10 June 1978 and a further three, probably of this species were observed at the mouth of the Yellow River in Sept 1991.

Outside of the breeding season there are three specimen records from Fujian dating from 1913 and 1916 and two probable observations from Guangdong, one of which was after a typhoon.

Away from China there are specimen records as follows: two from the Philippines (1905 and undated), one from Halmahera, Indonesia (1861) and three each from Malaysia (Sarawak 1890, prior to 1891 and 1913) and Thailand (three winter-plumage males collected in 1923). The only recent sight record concerned 10-20 reported from Ko Libong Wildlife Sanctuary in Thailand in July 1980.

In June 2000 Liang Chieh-teh was fortunate to discover a Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini* colony in the Matzu Archipelago. Here the authors give some background to this exciting discovery.

The Chinese Crested Tern is a critically endangered species. It was first described in 1863 and since its discovery only five groups of birds have been recorded. The two most recent records concerned ten in Thailand in July 1980 and three in northern China in September 1991. Several authors consider this bird may already be extinct.<sup>1,2</sup>

The Matzu Archipelago (25°56'–26°18'N, 119°51'–120°01'E) is a short distance east of the Fukien province of mainland China and due to its strategic importance was under military regulation and very difficult to visit for the general public. The fauna and flora of the area were largely unknown. In recent years the central government of China eased the military regulation of the area and more birdwatchers and naturalists began to visit the area.

A three year project to study bird ecology in the area, coordinated by Wild Bird Federation of Taiwan (formerly Chinese Wild Bird Federation) and financed by Agriculture Improvement Bureau of Lienchiang County began in April 1996 and improved our understanding of the bird fauna. The survey found that several uninhabited islets are very important breeding sites for terns with large colonies of Greater Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*, Bridled Tern, *S. anaethetus* and Roseate Tern *S. dougallii*. The results of the survey prompted the Lienchiang County Government to define the islets as a nature reserve and in January 2000, eight islets used by breeding terns were officially designated as 'National Matzu Nature Reserve for

Terns' by Central Government Council of Agriculture.

In order to increase public awareness of conservation in the reserve, Lienchiang County Government supported a project of Wild Bird Federation of Taiwan to film the breeding terns. The project started in June 1999 and was carried out by Liang Chieh-teh. In mid-June 2000 while editing the film of a Greater Crested Tern colony videoed on 1st June, several pairs of strange terns were noted. After checking a reference book<sup>3</sup> these birds were identified as Chinese Crested Tern based on their smaller size and paler upperparts than Greater Crested Tern and black tips to their bills. The film was sent to Dr. Lucia Liu Severinghaus who helped to confirm the identification.

On 29th June Liang and Mr. Chang Shou-Hua, the Secretary General of Wild Bird Society of Matzu visited the colony for more fieldwork. They surveyed the area and found four breeding pairs of Chinese Crested Tern, with eight adults and four chicks. This is the highest count of the species ever.

In late July Liang took Dr. Severinghaus to the Terns' colony to confirm the identification in the field and a press conference was later held to announce the important find.

On 26th August the authors again visited the terns' colony but only one Chinese Crested Tern in non-breeding plumage remained at the site along with 40+ Greater Crested Tern. This was the last sighting of this bird this year.

Currently the breeding site is in a National Nature Reserve under the protection of law and the Magistrate Liu of Lienchiang County Government is very supportive of the conservation of the site. The major threat now is fisherman from mainland China invading these islets to collect seashells or bird eggs. After disturbance by fisherman in 1999 a previous Bridled Tern breeding site had no birds in the following breeding season. Since the colony is very sensitive to disturbance, control of visiting tourists will also be a problem during the next breeding season.

After the announcement of the rediscovery we received reports of two earlier sightings. One was from Chang Shou-hua who took many photographs of the Matzu tern colony in previous years. Using a magnifying glass to examine early photographs he found some Chinese Crested Terns in a Greater Crested Tern colony. This finding suggests the Chinese Crested Tern may have been breeding at this site for some time. The other report was from Weng Jung-hsiun, who took a picture of a single Chinese Crested Tern in a flock of Caspian Terns *S. caspia* at Putai, Chiayi County (23°21'N, 120°10'E) on 17th April 1998. Initially, this bird was thought to be an immature Greater Crested Tern but was later reidentified as the first and the only Chinese Crested Tern record from Taiwan (Photo 2, p. 20).

We consulted several handbooks and fieldguides about this bird. According to our observations, the plates of this bird are not entirely accurate;<sup>1-7</sup> there is a white point to the black tip of the bill. Only two books demonstrated this feature.<sup>1,4</sup> The bill colour is more orange than Greater Crested Tern but all the plates illustrated it as yellow (as in Greater Crested Tern) except duPont.<sup>5</sup>

Note: Under a different spelling system, Matzu may be spelled as Matsu and Lienchiang as Lian-jiang.

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Chinese Crested Terns *Sterna bergii*.  
Centre, with Caspian Terns *S. caspia* (bird  
on right). Photo by Weng Jung-hsiun.  
Lower, with Greater Crested Terns *S.*  
*bergii*. Photos 1 & 3 by Chang Shou-hua.

# A preliminary survey of the western population of Finn's Weaver in Kumaon terai, Uttar Pradesh, Northern India

Of the four species of weaverbird found in the Indian subcontinent, the Finn's or Yellow Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus* is the least known. The species occurs very locally in the lower terai from the plains to 1,300 m. It is a globally threatened species and is listed by BirdLife International as Vulnerable.<sup>1</sup> It was previously reported to be an endemic resident of India<sup>2,3</sup> but has recently been reported from Nepal.<sup>4,5,6</sup> A large breeding colony of Finn's Weaver was rediscovered in Kumaon terai in 1959<sup>7</sup> after two fruitless searches by Salim Ali in 1934 and again in 1954 with H. Alexander.<sup>8,9</sup> This article presents the results of a survey for the species in Kumaon terai.

## Introduction

Finn's Weaver is a globally threatened species listed by BirdLife International as Vulnerable. It is classified under the C1 and C2a categories, C1 being a continuing decline in population, and C2a being a continuing decline in population due to severe fragmentation.<sup>1</sup> It is listed under Schedule IV of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972,<sup>10</sup> which prevents trapping and hunting of the species.

Ali & Crook<sup>7</sup> describe its field characteristics as: adult male (breeding plumage): "Above, head and nape bright yellow with contrasting dark brown ear-coverts. Back and upperparts dark brown, broadly streaked. Rump yellow. Below, from chin to vent, including flanks, bright golden yellow (richer and deeper than in the Baya). Beginnings of a dark brown collar or breast-band on sides." "First-year male in breeding season exactly like female. The latter can be distinguished in the hand by smaller overall proportions, and slenderer bill and tarsus." Adult female (breeding): "Above, head and nape pale canary yellow, or brownish heavily suffused with yellow. Rest of upperparts rich brown, streaked darker. Below, pale canary yellow or yellowish-white."

## Previous History

Historically Finn's Weaver is known from two birds (in non-breeding plumage) collected in December 1866 from Kaladoonge in Nainital district in northern India by Hume.<sup>7</sup> Following this, males in breeding plumage were procured from the Calcutta bird market in 1901 by Frank Finn, Superintendent of the Indian Museum, who was told that these birds came from Nainital. These moulting males matched the description of Hume's birds from Kaladoonge. Later in 1912,

H.V.O Donel found the first breeding colony in Hasimara, Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal.<sup>11</sup> Some birds appeared from time to time in the Calcutta bird markets that were later examined by H. Abdulali.<sup>12</sup> A large breeding colony of Finn's Weaver was rediscovered in Kumaon terai in 1959<sup>7</sup> after two fruitless searches by Salim Ali in 1934 and again in 1954 with H. Alexander.<sup>8,9</sup> More breeding colonies were recorded near Calcutta and Darrang district in Assam.<sup>9,13</sup>

## Ecology

Finn's Weaver is a gregarious species found in pure terai country in which marshes and stands of Sarpat *Imperata arundinacea* and Elephant Grass *Saccharum spontaneum* are sparsely scattered with isolated trees particularly Silk Cotton *Salimalia malabarica*, and occasionally interspersed with patches of rice and sugar cultivation. It feeds on rice grains, hemp and small insects.<sup>2</sup>



Fig 1. Nesting colony of Finn's Weaver on top of *Salimalia malabarica*.

Finn's Weaver nests colonially in treetops or in reedbeds (Fig 1) after the rains from late May to August. Unlike the nests of the other three Indian weavers, which are suspended, the nest of Finn's is a large globular structure supported by twigs or reed stems. The nest is an untidy structure, firmly woven with long strips of coarse grass, with the entrance on top and to one side. Interestingly, multiple nests built by single males are usually linked together with connecting walls or by separate strands of vegetation bound firmly at each end to different individual nests.<sup>3,7</sup>

Finn's Weaver has been recognized as two races (Grimmett *et al.* 1998) or subspecies:<sup>2,12,14</sup>

- Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus megarhynchus* Hume (under tail-coverts white). Resident with a very local distribution in the Kumaon terai below Nainital,<sup>2,7</sup> Meerut<sup>15</sup> and Delhi.<sup>16</sup> Recently a few have been reported near a wetland in the Etawah district of Uttar Pradesh during the summer of 1998 (Gopi Sundram pers. comm).
- Eastern Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus salimalii* Abdulali (Under tail-coverts yellow). Locally distributed in Hasimara in Jalpaiguri district, northern Bengal, near the Bhutan border, Agia near Goalpara in western Assam and salt lake near Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> It has also been sighted in Kaziranga National Park<sup>16,17</sup> and Manas Tiger Reserve<sup>18</sup> in Assam.

The breeding male of *P. m. salimalii* differs from *P. m. megarhynchus* in having a pure yellow head, less yellow on rump, and white undertail coverts and sometimes also a white belly. Females are entirely yellow from chin to under tail coverts in *P. m. salimalii* and chin to upper belly in *P. m. megarhynchus*.<sup>2,4,14</sup>

A preliminary survey was carried out of the western population of Finn's Weaver *P. m. megarhynchus* in the Kumaon terai approximately 40 years after the rediscovery of the species. From 1997 to 1999 field surveys were carried out in the breeding season of Finn's Weaver at approximately the same times and places as reported in 1961<sup>3,7</sup> and 1979.<sup>15</sup>

### Past surveys in Kumaon terai

The study on the breeding biology of the largest known population of Finn's Weaver in Kumaon terai<sup>7</sup> was carried out by V. C. Ambedkar in 1961-63.<sup>3</sup> Earlier surveys from 10 July to 8 August 1959<sup>7</sup> had recorded several colonies of Finn's Weaver on the main Rampur-Nainital road. Colonies

were observed on both the Rudrapur-Bazpur road and on the Lalkua-Bareilly road near Kitcha. Twenty colonies with up to 200 nests were also recorded on the Rampur-Nainital highway in July and August 1959 and also on the Bilaspur-Rudrapur road. Although Ali and Crook<sup>7</sup> suggested that the species was "not at all rare or uncommon in this locality," it might have been overlooked due to its habit of nesting in treetops.

These colonies were also studied in the breeding seasons of 1961 to 1963 when about 800 nests in 21 breeding colonies were recorded between 1 July and 20 August 1961. Most of the colonies were located away from human habitation.<sup>3</sup> Breeding studies were also carried out at the Fish Culture Pond colony near Rudrapur. Apart from these studies of the western population, virtually no information on the species has become available in recent years.

Further records of a colony of 28 nests in Meerut<sup>15</sup> and two male Finn's Weavers at the nest in Okhla, Delhi<sup>16</sup> are the only other published records for this western population of Finn's Weaver. The recent discovery of 11 birds in Sukla phanta (= Sukila phanta) in southwest Nepal about 50 km from Kaladoonge<sup>5</sup> suggests a wider range for the western population of Finn's Weaver.

### Present survey

The present survey was carried out in areas mentioned by earlier workers. The following places were visited in the Kumaon terai in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi in northern India during the breeding seasons of 1997, 1998 and 1999:

- Udham Singh Nagar District (initially a part of Nainital district): Rudrapur, Ghadarpur, Bazpur, Kitcha, Sitarganj and Dineshpur.
- Nainital District: Haldwani and Lalkau.
- Rampur District: Rampur and Bilaspur
- Meerut district: Hastinapur, Qila and Parikshitgarh.
- Delhi: Okhla barrage.

### Methodology

Field visits were made from 0530 to 1030 and then 1430 to 1830 with the use of a two-wheeled vehicle and on foot. A party of two to three people searched the area on village tracks, wherever there was likely habitat for Finn's Weaver. Observations in the mornings were prolonged until afternoon if there were any sightings. Details about Finn's



Weaver records were collected from several bird trappers who knew about the species from Meerut to Rudrapur, both important bird trade centres within a range of 200 km.

The first survey was in the last week of August 1997. Rudrapur, Kitcha, Sitarganj and Dineshpur blocks of Udham Singh Nagar and Haldwani and Lalkau were visited for six days. Although Finn's Weaver could not be located the other three species of weaver were recorded breeding in several areas. After extensive searching and interviews, on 29 August 1997 a local trapper showed us approximately twenty abandoned nests on a 8–10 m high Shesham tree *Dalbergia sissoo* in Kitcha. Fresh grown top leaves were evident, which proved that the nests were abandoned nearly 8–10 days previously.

Ambedkar<sup>3</sup> mentions that Finn's Weaver has two distinct breeding periods; the first from May to the middle of July, the second in August and September. His observations show that in the first period the birds build their nests in treetops, and in the second low down among *Typha* beds standing in water. In 1962 Ambedkar studied nesting of Finn's Weaver in a *Typha* bed (roughly half an acre) near Rudrapur adjacent to the Fish Culture pond on the Rudrapur-Phoolbagh road where nesting was observed from 26 July to 8 September. The breeding of Finn's Weaver in reedbeds once the rains have set in is a regular feature.<sup>3</sup> The fish pond and surrounding areas near Rudrapur were visited but Finn's Weaver was not located. Most of this area had changed, with dormant fish ponds, but other species of weaver were recorded breeding on *Acacia* and *Saccharum* in spite of the presence of several human habitations.

The second survey was carried out from 28 July to 1 August 1998 in Kitcha and other Udham Singh blocks. The sighting of abandoned nests in 1997 gave hope of finding the species present. Again no Finn's Weaver were present, but abandoned nests were found on a *Salmalia malabarica* tree in a different location in Kitcha and another abandoned nesting colony of 15–20 nests on *S. malabarica* on the Rudrapur-Nainital road. Some areas on the Rudrapur-Bilaspur road were surveyed including an extensive search around the Bilaspur dam. Extensive stands of various grasses were found, but no Finn's Weaver, although all the other species of weaver were recorded. In mid-July of the same year the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary in Meerut was visited and extensively searched and several people were interviewed. There was no indication

of Finn's Weaver despite large stands of *Typha*, *Saccharum* and *Imperata*. All other weaver species were recorded breeding however. Rai<sup>15</sup> had actually seen 28 Finn's Weaver on 17 June 1979 in Hastinapur, about 35 km from Meerut. Because of the presence of extensive stands of *Typha* and *Saccharum* the area was surveyed again in mid-August in the hope of locating Finn's Weaver in the *Typha* beds, but the species was not found to be present. Extensive trapping of all three weavers and munias continues from May to August in and around Meerut, and the catches had been checked for the last seven to eight years but not a single Finn's Weaver was reported which left little hope of its presence near Meerut. Old professional trappers reported the presence of the species in other areas in Meerut District at Quila and Parikshitgarh. Therefore these sites were visited during the first week of August. Despite the presence of good grassland there was no evidence of the species.

During late May 1998 a visit was made to the Okhla area in Delhi following reports by a local birdwatcher of a large weaverbird in a flock of Baya Weavers *P. philippinus* (A. Mukherjee 1998, pers comm). During a field visit we could not locate any Finn's Weaver, but a group of 30–40 Baya and Black-breasted Weaver *P. benghalensis* was present. Most of the Baya Weavers were males in pre-nuptial moult and acquiring yellow plumage. The absence of a brown throat patch in most birds at this stage can cause confusion with females and sub-adult male Finn's Weaver.

The last survey was carried out from 24 June to 27 June 1999 in Udham Singh Nagar. Three breeding colonies were located in the district. The two localities with abandoned nests located during the 1998 survey showed no signs of nesting activity. The first colony contained approximately 20 nests on a 20 m tall Silk Cotton tree. About 30–40 breeding plumage birds were present. Most of the nests had almost been completed while a few were still under construction. Below this tree was a sewage outlet with *Saccharum* and *Imperata* grasses. All three other species of weaver were also breeding. A flock of four to eight male Finn's Weaver would repeatedly come to the stands of grass and return with thin strands to their nest. Most of the adult males were then seen displaying. Finn's Weaver would come in mixed sex groups to feed on large stands of Hemp *Cannabis sativa* and Millet *Panicum* present at the site. On several occasions the birds were seen to feed on insects on the millet spike rather than on the millet grain. The females

were seen to return to the nest with insects. A pair of Black Drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus* was also recorded nesting in the same tree. Several villagers came to take trolleys full of grass for selling as cattle fodder (Fig 2).

The next breeding locality was found about four km from this site. About 8-10 nests were present and a small flock of 8-10 males was seen completing nests on a Silk Cotton tree. This tree was 12–15 m high and located close to a sugarcane field with some *Saccharum* nearby. There was a small water inlet from a crop field beneath this tree.

The third and biggest colony had about 30–40 nests and was located approximately 30 km from the first two sites. This was one of the most prominent breeding sites and was in full swing with more than two-thirds of nests completed. Individuals were foraging away from the colony, probably because no crop fields or hemp were present within a 500 m radius. Observations were made for almost two days at this site. The area consisted of totally degraded grassland with several cattle being brought in for foraging. *Saccharum* and other grass stands were almost absent. There was a small water inlet below this tree, a feature common to all the three nesting locations.

Both House Crows *Corvus splendens* and Jungle Crows *C. levaillantii* were observed making several attempts to prey upon this nesting colony although male weaver birds would get together and chase them away. However, on 30 June at 11.55 a party of six crows raided the site. Four semi-grown chicks were eaten along with several eggs. Within half an hour the whole colony had been attacked. Occasionally Finn's Weaver would inspect and then leave the nest. On 1 July the site was reached at about 05.40 and no Finn's Weaver were found until 09.00. A repeat visit was made on the same afternoon but the breeding site had been deserted.

According to Ali & Crook<sup>7</sup> the mobbing of crows by Finn's Weaver had not been observed, the birds being driven away by drongos nesting close to the colonies. Mobbing behaviour was observed by Finn's Weaver towards human intruders. Ambedkar<sup>3</sup> mentions nest predation by crows and also that crows may be driven away by male Finn's Weaver. Ali & Crook's<sup>7</sup> studies showed that five out of seven nesting colonies were located in trees containing a breeding pair of Black Drongos. Finn's Weaver apparently gains certain benefits from this association as Black

Drongos aggressively drive away predatory birds while leaving the weavers unmolested.<sup>3,7</sup>

### Threats and reason for decline of western population

The largest known population of western Finn's Weaver has a restricted distribution in Kumaon terai. Past surveys by earlier workers from 1959 to 1963 suggested that the species was: "not at all rare and uncommon in this locality".<sup>7</sup> After forty years the area has been largely converted to agricultural land and Rahmani & Qureshi<sup>19</sup> reported the apparent disappearance of colonies. Professional bird trappers in the area report a severe decline of Finn's Weaver catches when compared to earlier catches in the seventies and eighties. The present survey shows that a small population at low density is present.

The main threat to this species comes as a result of the rapid increase of human populations and their associated livestock. Studies by Ambedkar<sup>3</sup> from 1961–63 were carried out within a 15 mile radius of Rudrapur, and a good population of Finn's Weaver was found. The Udham Singh Nagar District measures 3,358 km<sup>2</sup> and is comprised of seven blocks (Khatima, Bajpur, Rudarpur, Kashipur, Gadarpur, Jaspur and Sitarganj) with Rudrapur as the district headquarters. All these areas were at one time part of the species' range. This area has since seen agricultural intensification and increasing human populations that can be related to the decline of Finn's Weaver. Parashar<sup>24</sup> states: "In the past 50 years, Udham Singh Nagar has emerged as the most prosperous district in Uttar Pradesh with nearly 200 rice mills, six sugar mills and nearly 400 big and small industrial units. This district is



Fig 2. Large scale commercial exploitation of local grasses in the breeding areas of Finn's Weaver.

perhaps the only district in India where there is tremendous progress in the fields of agriculture and industry. This area was brought under the Udham Singh Nagar District (at the time known as Nainital) by the British in 1901 where the Tharu and Buxa tribes were the only inhabitants, using primitive farming methods (jhum). In the early fifties Hindu and Sikh refugees who had fled from Pakistan after partition were allotted plots as part of a rehabilitation program. Burmese nationals also came to the area. Later, families of freedom fighters were also allotted plots in this area. In the seventies and eighties after the separation of Bangladesh and the rise of terrorism in Punjab the area witnessed a further influx of people. At present the total population of the area is more than 1.4 million".

The drastic change in land use pattern has almost certainly played a part in the decline of the species, as most grasslands have been converted to agricultural use over the last 50 years. The absence of nesting colonies had become evident by the late sixties. Ambedkar,<sup>3</sup> for example, had recorded a nesting colony of Finn's Weaver in a *Ficus bengalensis* tree in the centre of Sultanpur village in 1961; the same tree simultaneously had nests of Baya Weaver, Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra* and Black Drongo. He visited the same area in the breeding season of 1968 where, except for Finn's Weaver, all the other "tenants" were nesting. Ambedkar<sup>3</sup> suggests that "the absence of Finn's Weaver is due to the absence of elephant grass from the surrounding area which is now under cultivation."

The increasing livestock population and the dependence on local grasslands is a cause for concern. The rainy season after the dry summer months initiates growth of several local grasses, which are quickly harvested or auctioned for domestic use and fodder (Fig 2). The dependence of farmers on grasses may lead to direct competition with weavers. The collection of mature grasses such as *Typha* for roofing just before the rains, coincides with the second breeding period of Finn's Weaver in *Typha*. Most of the sites surveyed had degraded patches of *Typha*, *Imperata* and *Saccharum* mostly at the fringes of water bodies and crop fields or with good grasslands being commercially exploited. The loss or reclamation of many wetlands with stands of *Typha* has also contributed to the decline of Finn's Weaver. Some local trappers reported that during the second breeding season excessive



Fig 3. Industrial effluent being channelled in the swamp areas is a common feature of many crop fields.

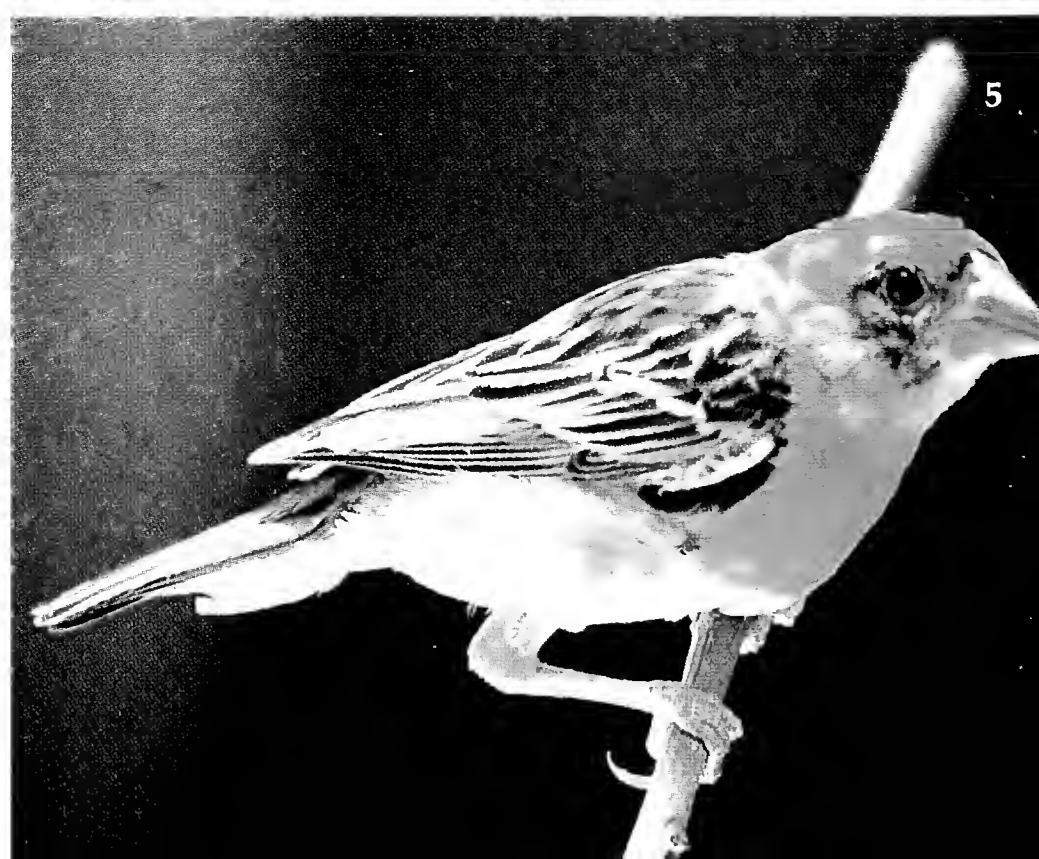
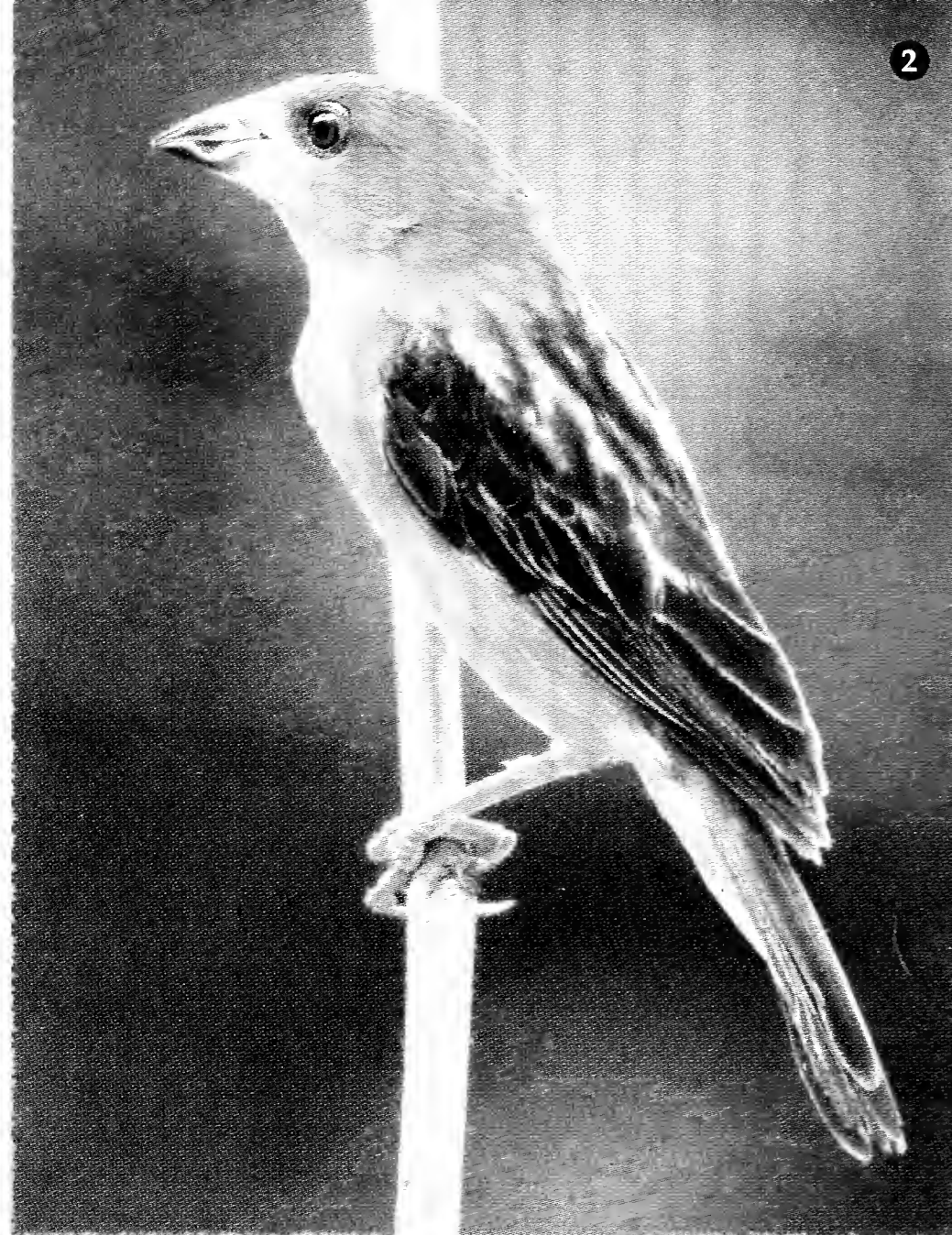
rains with subsequent water increase may flood nests. However, this requires confirmation.

The third survey site with 30-40 nests is also threatened as two fairly large development projects were evident. In the first two survey sites polluted industrial effluents from cardboard and other industries were seen to be leaching into swampy areas that may have some effect on birds in the area (Fig 3). Cattle were abundant at one of the sites.

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Captions for plate on pages 26 and 27. All photos are by Rajat Bhargava.

- 1 Adult male Finn's Weaver in full breeding plumage.
- 2 Adult female Finn's Weaver in full breeding plumage; first year males in the breeding plumage look exactly like the female in breeding plumage.
- 3 Adult non-breeding Finn's Weaver. Females and sub-adult males are alike in non-breeding plumage.
- 4 Non-breeding male/female Baya Weaver. Female Baya Weaver does not acquire any breeding plumage and remains the same throughout the year, male Baya Weaver does acquire a yellow breeding plumage.
- 5 Male Baya Weaver in pre-nuptial moult acquiring yellow plumage. This phase may be easily confused with moulting Finn's Weaver.
- 6 Streaked Weaver *Ploceus manyar*, male and female.
- 7 Black-breasted Weaver *P. benghalensis*, males.
- 8 Black-breasted Weaver *P. benghalensis*, female.
- 9 Baya Weaver *P. philippinus*, male.



6



7



8



9



*Production of this double colour plate  
has been generously sponsored by Leica  
(Captions are on page 25)*



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Finn's Weaver has been recorded in the bird trade since 1901 but until recent investigations<sup>7,10,14,20,24</sup> the species remained largely unknown to most ornithologists. Although not targeted by local trappers, the species occasionally gets caught at roost sites in sugarcane and tall grass which it shares with other species of weavers and munias.

The rising population of crows (related to development pressures with simultaneous increase of garbage and human habitation) and their impact through nest predation on breeding colonies could be the reason for unsuccessful breeding in several instances. The other three species of Indian weaverbird have suspended tube-like nests which may be harder to raid than that of Finn's, leading to proportionately increased rates of predation.

## Recommendations

- A long-term study on the present status and threats to Finn's Weaver is urgently required.
- The increasing biotic pressures on terai grasslands due to increasing human and livestock populations, unsustainable levels of fodder harvesting, unplanned land reclamation for cultivation, improper drainage and recycling of industrial effluents requires systematic management measures as suggested by several grassland ecologists. Measures to minimise further habit loss are required for Finn's Weaver and protection should be given to grassland ecosystems containing other grassland specialist species.<sup>21,22</sup>
- Some of the species' breeding areas should be brought under the 'Important Bird Areas' program in collaboration with BNHS / Birdlife International.
- A few specimens could be translocated on an experimental basis to similar habitats in protected areas such as Dudwa Tiger Reserve and Corbett National Park, as the species has recently been sighted in Sukula Phata in Nepal in 1998 quite close to these protected areas.
- The species needs to be moved from Schedule IV of the Indian (Wildlife) Protection Act, 1972 (as amended in 1991) to Schedule I to provide maximum possible protection. It needs to be listed under the CITES list to avoid illegal trade with strict enforcement along its trade route. Studies should be carried out into the impact of trade on Finn's Weaver populations.
- A conservation awareness program to educate the people in the immediate vicinity of its habitat is also urgently needed.

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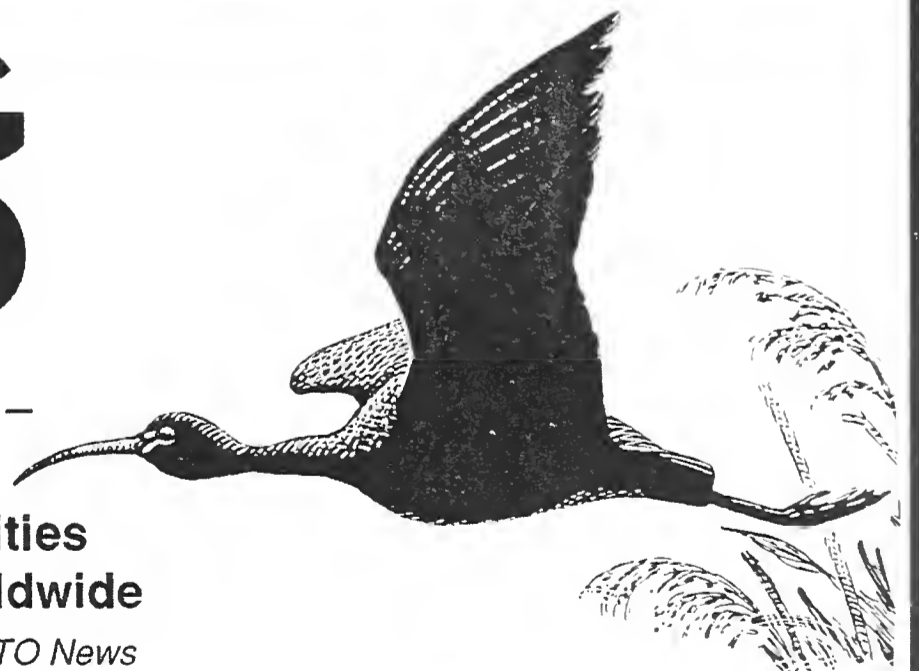
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# Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

## China

### Long Valley under threat from railway

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society has mounted a campaign to stop a railway which is planned to run through Long Valley in the New Territories. Long Valley is the last example of the once extensive flood plains in the northern New Territories. The area contains a diversity of micro-habitats which allow it to support a diverse range of birds: more than 200 species have been recorded. In the draft IBA (Important Bird Area) plan for Hong Kong, Long Valley has been made part of the "Deep Bay - Shenzhen River Catchment Area". The area is effectively the last place where wet agriculture is practised in Hong Kong and so carries a particular heritage value in addition to its biodiversity value.

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society raised formal objection under local law in December 1999. However, recent indications are that the government and the railway company are determined to proceed with the planned route (which cuts the most valuable habitat in half), although alternative routes have been proposed by the HKBWS. Another railway route on the drawing board will also run into the plain in a few years time, fragmenting the habitat further and totally

destroying its ecological value. One thing that opponents have achieved so far is the rerouting of a highway originally designed to go down Long Valley. It has now been diverted to its periphery and HKBWS is asking the government why the railway could not do the same.

You can visit the HKBWS website at <http://www.hkbws.org.hk> where there's a special section on "SAVE LONG VALLEY". The Society is seeking your support in the form of e-mail through the "SEND" icon at the page <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/lvalley/index.html> to the Hon. Tung Chee-hwa, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (his e-mail address is: [ceo@ceo.gcn.gov.hk](mailto:ceo@ceo.gcn.gov.hk)).

Please ask him to stop the railway from going into Long Valley and further ask him to promote active government management of the habitat with conservation as the primary objective, with side benefits in terms of heritage preservation, education for the younger generation and eco-tourism opportunities.

This is only the second objection raised by the Society in its forty three years of existence; the last time being against real estate development destroying wetland in the Deep Bay - Mai Po area which has now been designated as a Ramsar Site.

Source: *Oriental Birding* newsgroup contribution by Carrie Ma, HKBWS

### And developers target Happy Island too...

Erik Hirschfeld writes: "Many of you have probably heard of or visited Happy Island, or Shijiutuo as its Chinese name is. This May was one of the best ever there, with frequent good falls of Siberian migrants and lots of rarities, including several threatened species. Our guides were very concerned about development plans for the island and recently I found the following webpage describing investment opportunities such as not only a birdwatching centre, but also a Moose Park, hovercraft landing dock, huge hotels, fishing ponds etc. For more details, please see <http://tangshan.investchina.net/en/project/tour/> We are coordinating an effort to try to put pressure on saving Shijiutuo and the first step is to compile data on threatened birds that occur there to see what the conservation focus should be on. We (and hopefully the birds) would therefore appreciate if those birders having visited Shijiutuo could send information on the following (criteria following Birds to Watch 2): Any records of critical, endangered or vulnerable birds such as Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana*, Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*, Grey-sided Thrush *Turdus fae* and daily totals of Saunders' (Black-



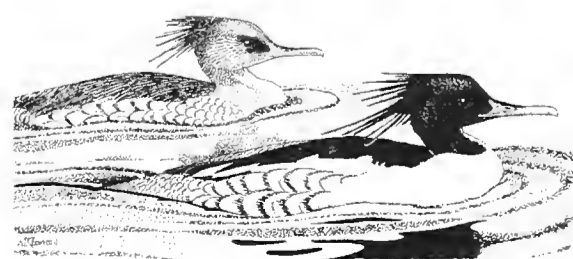
billed) Gulls *Larus saundersi* and Relict Gulls *L. relictus*. Records of large numbers (several hundreds) of waders, especially Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Knot *Calidris canutus*, Great Knot *C. tenuirostris* are also welcome. The material will then be compiled to be used in further work on preserving Shijiutuo. Of course, this information will be shared with anybody who has an interest in Shijiutuo. If you also know of references for articles published (in any language) on Shijiutuo in the ornithological press, it would be most useful to demonstrate to the Chinese that Shijiutuo is well-known and has eco-tourism potential.

Source: *Oriental Birding* newsgroup contribution by Erik Hirschfeld ([e.hirschfeld@swipuet.se](mailto:e.hirschfeld@swipuet.se))

### New populations of mergansers, cranes and bustards

The magazine *China Nature* reports that a wintering population of 100 Scaly-sided Mergansers *Mergus squamatus* has been discovered east of Poyang Lake in northeastern Jiangxi Province. The birds were found in winter 1999 in Yiyang county on a ten km long stretch of the Xinjiang river which flows into Poyang lake. The area is sparsely populated and unpolluted and has been made into a nature reserve, the report says. This would appear to be the world's largest known concentration of Scaly-sided Merganser, larger than the flock of up to 76 reported in Heilongjiang in September 1997.

Up to 240 Great Bustards *Otis tarda* have been found wintering in the Guanzhong area of southern Shaanxi province. The birds were seen in wheat fields near the Wei He river around Weinan, about 80 km east of Xi'an, from Dec 5, 1999 to at least Feb 22, 2000, when the peak of 240 was seen. The report says Great Bustards were seen on 14 occasions, with a total of 1,098 sightings, and that previous estimates of the total Chinese population of the nominate subspecies have varied between 400 and 1,000 (Birds to Watch 2 says "probably at least 1,500"). The report also says Great Bustards are under strong pressure from intensive agriculture, with the birds dependent on the extensive winter wheat fields in an area with a human population of 710 per km<sup>2</sup>. Hunting pressure is also severe, with the fields so full of men and dogs in November when the bustards first arrive that they have difficulty finding a field to land in. *China Nature* also reports that up to 125 Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha* overwinter at Chongming island near Shanghai, but that numbers are declining due to land reclamation. Their presence, from early November to late March, was first noted by Prof Yu Kuai of Shanghai Normal [Teachers] University in 1998 and efforts are being made to conserve



Scaly-sided Mergansers *Mergus squamatus* by Nik Borrow (Courtesy of Birdquest)

their habitat which is being destroyed by industry and intensive agriculture. See also *OBC Bull.* 27:16 on Chongming as an important shorebird site.

Source: Michael Rank

### Wetland reserve declared in Tibet

"China will soon establish the country's first highland wetland nature reserve at Namco, in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region.

Namco Lake, which is 70 km long and 30 km wide, is the second largest saltwater lake in China and the highest lake in the world with an elevation of 4,718 m. It nestles between the Tanggula Mountain and northern Tibet grasslands.

Establishment of the nature reserve is of great importance to maintaining the wetland ecological system and adjusting the climate at Namco. It will also help maintain sustainable development and develop tourism in the region. A comprehensive scientific survey team, consisting of researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the regional forest and tourism departments of Tibet are conducting a round-the-lake investigation."

Source: *Xinhua news agency/BBC Monitoring*, October 22, 2000

## India

### Catastrophic vulture decline continues

The World Working Group on Birds of Prey has turned its attention to the dramatic decline in vulture populations in the Indian subcontinent

(*OBC Bull.* 30: 19). A disease factor continues to decimate the populations of White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* and both species of Long-billed Vultures, *G. indicus* and *G. tenuirostris* in India. In Nepal, at least some populations of the White-backed Vultures are in a state of rapid decline; there is no information on any changes in the status of the Himalayan Griffon, *G. himalayensis*. Available information is also insufficient to determine whether the same disease factor played a role in the earlier collapse of vulture populations in countries east of India, but such a possibility is plausible. The first symptoms of the disease have been observed in the White-backed Vultures of Pakistan. Traditionally 25-30 Eurasian Griffons, *G. fulvus*, have wintered in Keoladeo National Park in eastern Rajasthan. Only two were recorded in 1997-98, and none has been seen since. The Eurasian Griffon ranges westwards to Europe; in north-eastern Africa its range overlaps with that of Rueppell's Griffon Vulture *G. rueppellii*, whose range in turn overlaps in eastern Africa with that of the African White-backed Vulture, *G. africanus*. A westward spread of the disease through Pakistan and beyond now appears to be inevitable.

Included in a conservation strategy must be the consideration that the Long-billed Vultures constitute two quite different species. The populations of the Long-billed and White-backed Vultures at the very western limit of their ranges in Pakistan may be the only populations not yet contaminated by the disease,

hence the need to identify for sure which Long-billed Vulture occurs there.

Dr. Bernd-U. Meyburg, Chairman of the World Working Group on Birds of Prey, has offered the facilities of "RAPTOR NEWS", the electronic newsletter of WWGBP for dissemination of information about the disease and its impacts. Currently there are over 2,000 addresses on the mailing list. To be included in the mailing list, an address should be sent to Dr. Meyburg ([wwgbp@aol.com](mailto:wwgbp@aol.com)) Robert W. Risebrough, The Bodega Bay Institute ([pelecanus@igc.org](mailto:pelecanus@igc.org)) Munir Ali Virani, The Peregrine Fund ([tpf@net2000ke.com](mailto:tpf@net2000ke.com)) Useful link: <http://www.raptors-international.de>

Source: *Oriental Birding newsgroup contribution by Des Allen*

### Two species of Long-billed Vulture?

As stated above, recent taxonomic work by Pamela Rasmussen and Steven Parry suggests that Long-billed Vulture should be split into two separate species *Gyps indicus* & *G. tenuirostris*. (Rasmussen, P. C. and S. J. Parry. 2000. On the specific distinctness of the Himalayan Long-billed Vulture *Gyps [indicus] tenuirostris*. Abstract, p. 64, 118th Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland).

Although consistently treated as a single species throughout the 20th C., the Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* is comprised of two extremely distinct taxa *Gyps [i.]*

*indicus* (Scopoli, 1786) and *Gyps [i.] tenuirostris* (Gray, 1844). These taxa are rather similar in size and proportions, but otherwise differ to the extent that we seriously doubt that they are sister taxa, and we consider it self-evident that both are full biological species. In most points of difference, *G. indicus* shares characters with other congeners, while those of *G. tenuirostris* are evidently autapomorphic. We have found over 50 consistent character-state differences between the species, most notably involving rostral, cranial, and narial morphology; type and extent of feathering of the head and neck; bare parts coloration; form and distribution of contour feathers; pedal scutation; and wing shape. The two species are readily separable in all plumages, even when in distant flight. Normally, *indicus* nests on cliffs, while *tenuirostris* always nests in trees. The two species appear to be allopatric or parapatric, and there is no evidence for intergradation. While *indicus* is nearly endemic to India, *tenuirostris* occurs along the base of the Himalayas from north-western India through south-east Asia. The name *Vultur indicus* Scopoli, 1786 is a *nomen dubium*, and the junior synonym *Gyps pallescens* Hume 1873, is available. The confusion between these taxa and their congeners has led to an extremely poor understanding of their distribution, status, and autecology, which is hampering conservation planning, made urgent by tremendous declines among Asian vultures.

Source: *Oriental Birding*  
 newsgroup contribution by  
 Pamela Rasmussen

### Siberian Cranes return to Bharatpur

News from Rajasthan: two Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* have returned to their traditional wintering grounds at the Keoladeo (Ghana) National Park, Bharatpur.

Source: *Oriental Birding*  
 newsgroup contribution by Kryst  
 Kazmierczak

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## Indonesia

### Every bird has its price

Visitors to Ngasem bird market in Tamansari area, some 500 m west of the Yogyakarta Palace, can witness rare and protected birds being freely traded.

These rare and protected birds cost between Rp 75,000 and Rp 150,000 each. At the market young eagles, for instance, are much more expensive than the adults. A young eagle might cost between Rp 150,000 and Rp 250,000 each. The young birds cost more than the adults because unlike the latter, they can still be tamed and trained, thus making them more attractive to buyers. The health and size of the birds are also important in determining their price.

However, most of the birds displayed at the market are obviously lacking care. For example, an adult eagle with a 50 cm wing span is placed in a cage measuring only 70cm long, 60 cm wide and 50 cm high. Therefore each time the eagle spreads its wings, it will injure itself. Other birds of prey such as owls *Strigiformes* can also be found at Ngasem bird market and they are sold

for between Rp 50,000 and Rp 60,000 each. A bird seller, Tri Sahidiman, said most traders get their birds from brokers who buy the birds from bird hunters operating in the Caruban forest area in Madiun, East Java. "Buyers at the bird market here are not only bird lovers but also traders from other cities, including those trading at the Pramuka bird market in Jakarta," he said.

For each bird he sells, Tri said he can make a Rp 10,000 to Rp 15,000 profit. He usually manages to sell the birds in less than a week after purchasing them from the broker. However, he declined to mention how much he paid the broker for the birds. He said if a bird was not sold after more than a week, he would not make a profit from selling it because it would have cost him more to feed it and also the price of the bird might fall if its physical condition starts to decline. "Just imagine, a bido eagle (Javan Hawk Eagle) eats two quails a day. If each quail costs Rp 2,000 in Ngasem, the eagle then costs about 28,000 a week only for its food," Tri explained.

Indonesia is home to more than 1,500 species of birds — 17 percent of the world's birds. Unfortunately many of them are now on the brink of extinction due to widespread illegal trading. It is estimated that there are only about 250 to 300 Javan Hawk Eagles *Spizaetus bartelsi* left in the wild. A female eagle can only produce one egg a year. The rare eagle was declared the national bird by the government in 1993. Since then, the Ministry of Forestry's directorate general for Forest Protection and Nature Preservation (PHPA) and some

environmental organizations, such as BirdLife, have conducted some conservation efforts to protect the bird. Law No. 5/1990 on the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems also states that endangered species must not be caught, wounded, killed, stored, possessed, transported or traded — alive or dead — without government permission. Anyone violating this law can face up to five years in prison or a Rp 100 million fine, but the law is not enforced. Besides rare birds, other animals such as snakes, mostly non-poisonous, are also sold at the Ngasem bird market. A one meter long, one to two-month-old snake can be sold for about Rp 150,000 each. Yadi, who has been selling exotic pets in the market for four years, said he can sell at least two snakes a week. The 23-year-old man said that most of his buyers were university students who chose to have snakes as pets because unlike birds, snakes were easier to take care of. For instance, birds should be fed everyday and their cages cleaned daily too. Snakes, on the contrary, only have to be fed once in two weeks with quails or rats. "They (the students) also often take the snakes to campus," said Yadi. Apart from snakes, Yadi also sells other reptiles such as iguanas, monitor lizards, porcupines and Panama lizards. He also had several Australian ground squirrels and hamsters. According to the traders, most of the buyers claim to be animal lovers and are willing to spend money to have their desired pets without realising that they are contributing to the declining

numbers of rare and protected animals.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, September 30, 2000

### **Kalimantan rivers poisoned by mercury**

The Kahayan River, the main tributary of Central Kalimantan's Kapuas River, is highly polluted with mercury due to an increase in illegal gold mining in the province. After purifying gold dust and ore with mercury and water, illegal miners throw the waste material into the Kahayan River. Head of the local Environmental Impact Management Agency (Bapedalda), Nael R. David, said the problem is getting worse. "Apart from the Kahayan River, 11 other tributaries of the Kapuas River are also contaminated with mercury, and this has made Kapuas River unsafe. It's a major threat for thousands of people living by the river banks who consume the water," he was quoted as saying. Research by Bapedalda staff indicates that it's not only the river which has become contaminated with mercury. Local fish in the rivers, as well as the hair and nails of the illegal miners, are also contaminated by the same pollutant. "Although they are illegal miners, they must take care of themselves to avoid danger, and we have to help them because they are unaware of the danger. We have advised them all to use 'mercury retort', a means of filtering liquid containing mercury before it is thrown into the river. Reports say that each year about 10 tons of mercury is thrown into the Kapuas River." That amount is enough to create a new

"Minamata tragedy". In the Japanese coastal region of Minamata in the 1960s, many women gave birth to babies suffering from physical defects because they had consumed crabs containing mercury that had been thrown into Minamata Bay. Illegal miners scoff at calls for them to purchase the mercury retort filter, because each device costs Rp2 million (US\$240). The illegal miners use about 7,060 machines to process rock and earth containing gold ore in a region covering 2,116 ha. Each machine is operated by four or five people. Many children are involved in the illegal mining. There have not yet been any reports of deformed babies being born in Central Kalimantan as a result of the mercury pollution.

Source: *Indonesian Observer*, September 13, 2000

### **Indonesia bans exports of logs**

Indonesia's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will maintain its ban on log exports implemented in an attempt to eradicate illegal logging in the country. "By imposing a ban on log exports, the logs sold abroad are automatically also illegal," Junior Minister for Forestry Nur Mahmudi Ismail said. According to him, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had previously opposed the Indonesian government's decision to ban log exports, will no longer interfere in the agricultural and forestry sectors. The IMF has given the government freedom to impose a ban on log exports, partly considering Indonesia's serious need to address its epidemic environmental problems, the minister added. Mahmudi disclosed that illegal logging

could not be eradicated effectively without a ban on log exports, because if log exports are still allowed, the government would have difficulties in controlling legal as well as illegal log exporters. The minister also cited that the policy is also supported by other ministers in charge of the economy, finance and industry. Commenting on assumptions that the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry has been rather slow in dealing with illegal logging, especially in announcing the forestry officials involved, Mahmudi said he has not received any written reports on the involvement of his staff. The minister said his office has conducted an investigation of those involved in illegal logging, including forestry officials, members of the military and police.

Source: *Asia Pulse*, September 7, 2000

### **Eighteen species of Asian raptor in peril**

At least 18 species of Asian raptors are in danger and in need of protection in the next three years, the second Asian Raptor Research and Conservation Symposium recommends. M. Yayat Afianto said: "Seven of the 18 endangered species are found in Indonesia, four in Japan, four in India and three in Taiwan," adding that the Indonesian raptors which need protection include the Javan Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi*, Sulawesi Hawk Eagle *S.lanceolatus*, Flores Hawk Eagle *S. cirrhatius florensis*, Javan Scops Owl *Otus angelinae*, Wallace's Hawk Eagle *S. nanius* and Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*.

Yayat said conservationists could not state with exactitude the number of remaining Javanese eagles "but we found recently that there are only about 300 Javanese eagles." The symposium also recommended that the law be properly enforced against poachers and illegal traffickers. "Both the sellers and buyers of endangered species must be punished," Yayat said. In Indonesia, illegal trafficking of endangered species involves military personnel and government officials, he added.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, July 29, 2000

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## Japan

### China sends female Crested Ibis to Japan

A young female Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon* donated by China arrived in Japan on October 14 for captive breeding under an environmental accord adopted the previous day in Tokyo between Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji. China was repaying the compliment of a grant from Japan to protect the remaining 200 wild birds in Shaanxi Province (*OBC Bull.* 30: 18) and follows the donation of a pair of Crested Ibis by the Chinese President Jiang Zemin two years ago. The 18-month-old Mei Mei was transported to the Sado Crested Ibis Conservation Centre on Sado Island, Niigata Prefecture to mate with Yu Yu, a male one month younger than her.

Japanese and Chinese officials are taking steps to preserve this critically endangered species and voiced

the hope that chicks will be born in spring 2001. The first chick would be sent to China and the second would stay in Japan under the accord, which calls for the two countries to share their offspring. A delegation from China's State Forestry Bureau brought Mei Mei to Japan from Xian, the capital of Shaanxi Province. Yu Yu was born in May last year to Yang Yang and You You, which were a gift from Jiang Zemin to Emperor Akihito on the occasion of the Chinese president's visit to Japan in 1998. Although the scientific name for Crested Ibis contains the Japanese word for Japan, the species no longer exists in the wild in the country. The last remaining bird from the former wild population, a female named Kin, thought to be 33 years old, lives at the Sado centre. Mori and Zhu also agreed to draw up a joint program to protect the ibises, Japanese Foreign Ministry officials said. The Sado Centre is also raising Shin Shin and Ai Ai, other offspring of Yang Yang and You You.

Source: *Kyodo News Service, Tokyo/BBC Monitoring*, October 14, 2000

### Steller's Sea Eagle on the Internet

For birders with a special interest in the Sea Eagle group it would be interesting to look at the website O-Washi-net. <http://www.fadr.msu.ru/o-washinet>. Completely dedicated to Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus* and joint researches of ornithologists from Russia, Japan and the USA, this site contains a lot of information and many attractive photos of this fascinating raptor.

Source: *Oriental Birding newsgroup contribution by Des Allen*

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## Siberia

### Spoon-billed Sandpiper on a knife-edge

Unique to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus* is a globally threatened (vulnerable) wader species.

The size of its population is unknown while the largest flock ever recorded is 257 birds in the Ganges delta, Bangladesh. The only population estimate based on real data was undertaken in the 1970s and resulted in a total of 2,000–2,800 breeding pairs, which seems to be an overestimate even for that time, and little information is known about the bird's population trend.

Between June and early August 2000, a survey of coastal areas in southern Chukotka Autonomous Area, NE Siberia, was undertaken by the International Arctic Expedition of the Institute of Ecology and Evolution, Russian Academy of Sciences. The most unexpected finding of the survey was the almost total absence of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in four locations formerly known as breeding sites for the species. This means that the population has declined drastically during the last one or two decades.

The summer of 2000 was generally favourable for breeding of various birds in the area surveyed, and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is known to be a site-faithful species. This means that seasonal conditions in the

summer of 2000 were not responsible for the negligible number of breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers recorded. Such results throw new light on previous indications of a possible species decline which came from two other more northerly breeding locations. There are no obvious reasons for the decline within the species' breeding range. Therefore, causes should be looked for on migration and/or wintering grounds, where migratory waders are known to meet many threats (e.g. see First Draft for the "Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Strategy: 2001 + 2005" at <http://ngo.asiapac.net/wetlands>). A bottleneck for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population is not known. Thus, if the current level of knowledge about the species is not urgently improved, there is a big chance of losing one more wader species before we find a clue to the situation.

Anyway, there are no doubts that the current status of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is endangered (possibly even critically endangered), not simply vulnerable anymore. Eugeny E. Syroechkovski, Jr ([rgg@eesjr.msk.ru](mailto:rgg@eesjr.msk.ru)) and Pavel S. Tomkovich ([tomkovic@1.zoomus.bio.msu.ru](mailto:tomkovic@1.zoomus.bio.msu.ru))

Source: *Oriental Birding*  
newsgroup contribution by  
Geoff Carey

### **An interesting find from the Russian Far East**

In the October 2000 issue of the journal 'Oryx' the discovery of 35 - 40 pairs of the globally threatened Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* at Furugelm Island in the Sea of Japan is reported. Furugelm Island is the most southerly island in the Russian Far East. The

discovery of this colony moves the breeding limit of the species more than 600 km further to the north-east in the Sea of Japan.

Source: *Oriental birding*  
newsgroup contribution by Axel  
Bräunlich

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## **Thailand**

### **Dams damned**

Plans for a new dam on the Klong Klai river have attracted strong objections from local people and environmental campaigners. The dam would be built inside the Krung Ching forest reserve in Nop Phitam sub-district, Nakhon Si Thammarat, at an estimated cost of 4.56 billion baht (approx. £74 million). It lies within the Khao Luang National Park where there's been a recent sight record of Giant Pitta *Pitta caerulea*. An environmental impact assessment on the project commissioned by the Royal Irrigation Department has been conducted and foresees "no negative effects". The department argued that the reservoir would be very useful as it would help store water for consumption and for feeding the industrial estate on the deep-sea port in nearby Si Chon district. Nitisak Tonimi, co-ordinator of the Wildlife and Fauna Preservation Foundation, said his group had surveyed the reserve and found habitats of leopards, elephants, tigers, tapir and Sumatran serow. Klom Panplod, head of the local watershed conservation movement, said villagers living near the forest have put up signboards with anti-reservoir messages. Mr Klom said the villagers' livelihood

depended on the rich forest which constitutes their primary source of food and income.

Source: *Bangkok Post*,  
September 1 and 19, 2000/  
Phil Round

### **And....**

The World Commission on Dams has declared Pak Moon dam a flop in all respects. In a report released yesterday, it said the dam was economically unjustifiable, caused serious damage to the ecosystem of the Moon river, and destroyed villagers' livelihoods. The report is billed as the first independent, comprehensive and peer-reviewed analysis of the dam in the Mekong river basin. On the question of predicted versus actual benefits, cost and impact, the cost overrun between the estimated cost of four billion baht (approx. £64.5m) and the actual cost of 6.5 billion baht (approx. £105m) was not considered excessive. However, compensation and resettlement costs increased 400% from the estimated 231.55 million baht (approx. £3.7m) to 1,113.1 million baht (approx. £18m). The actual electricity generating capacity of the Pak Moon project calculated from daily power output during 1995-98 was only 20.81 MW compared to the estimated capacity of 150 MW. The actual number of households displaced by the Pak Moon dam was 1,700 instead of 241 as predicted as a result of declining fishing yield. Of the 265 fish species recorded in the Moon-Chi watershed before 1994, only 96 species were recorded in the upstream region. Fish catches upstream declined by 60-80%. The fish pass, or fish ladder,

constructed after the completion of the dam has failed to help upstream fish migration. Fishing communities reported a 50-100% decline in catches and the disappearance of many fish species. More than 50 natural rapids were permanently submerged. These rapids served as a habitat for a number of fish species. The report also said the project did not comply with the existing World Bank guidelines that required a new environmental impact assessment and appropriate impact mitigation prior to the implementation of the redesigned project.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, September 20, 2000/  
Phil Round

### **Park fees x10 tabled for foreigners**

Tour operators in three southern provinces are to petition the forestry chief against a 10-fold increase in entry fees for foreign tourists visiting national parks. Thira Khianphothiramart, president of Phuket Tour and Transport Companies' Club, said 130 tour and transport firms from Phuket, Phang-nga and Krabi had agreed to appeal to Plodprasop Suraswadi to review the Forestry Department's decision, citing a negative impact on inbound tours. The entrepreneurs will provide Mr Plodprasop with information to support their complaint, including the quoted prices of tours presented to foreign tour agents. Charn Wongsattayanant, chairman of the provincial chamber of commerce, said operators have been affected by the fee increase, which went into effect on Aug 15. The

department failed to conduct a feasibility study, so the policy has many shortcomings and cannot ensure transparency in the collection of admission fees to national parks, he added. Under the policy, entry fees for foreigners at national parks have increased from 20 baht to 200 baht for adults (£0.32 to £3.20) and from 10 baht to 100 baht for children under 14 (£0.16 to £1.60).

Source: *Bangkok Post*, September 20, 2000/  
Phil Round

### **BCST email address**

And if you ARE visiting Thailand...the correct email address of the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) is bcst@box1.a-net.net.th The email address of BCST in Craig Robson's book, *A Field Guide to the Birds of South East Asia* is incorrect.

Source: Uthai Treesucon

### **(Elephant) trunk calls banned to safeguard tree trunks**

Mae Yom National Park has been declared off limits to domestic elephants and the local Forestry Department chief has ordered his staff to shoot them if necessary. Mae Yom is home to the precious golden teak which is a magnet to the twin instruments of all illegal logging operations - man and domestic elephants. Forestry Department chief Plodprasop Suraswadi ordered the sealing of the forest straddling Lampang's Ngao district and Phrae's Song district, after the recent discovery of huge stacks of illegally-cut logs. The department, however, still does not know how best to keep local villagers out of the

forests. Mr Plodprasop said finding those people alternative jobs should help but that was not the agency's responsibility. Harnnarong Yaowalert, a Wildlife Fund of Thailand staff member, admitted it would be difficult to get people to switch from being highly-paid timber fellers to low-income jobs like farming. Preecha Puangkham, a veterinarian at the Thai Elephant Conservation Centre in Lampang, also disagreed with the plan to drive elephants away from Mae Yom National Park. Mr Preecha was worried the elephants could be taken to work in neighbouring countries where they were far from help if they fell sick or were wounded by land mines. Getting rid of corrupt officials was the first thing the department must do if it was to stop illegal logging. There were many reports of officials being bribed to turn a blind eye to illegal logging.

"Sometimes the trees were cut right next to the forestry checkpoint," Mr Preecha said.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, October 23, 2000/Phil Round

### **Reafforestation....with Eucalyptus**

A local administrative body has vowed to continue to oppose a project to grow eucalyptus trees on some 250,000 rai (40,000 ha) of degraded forest land in Tha Takiab district, which they fear will affect the environment. Somchai Assawachaisophon, president of the provincial administration organisation [PAO], said Tha Takiab residents and provincial councillors are opposed to a cabinet resolution which permits a Thai-Chinese joint-venture firm to plant

eucalyptus trees on 250,000 rai of degraded forest land in the district for production of paper pulp for China. The PAO had filed a petition against the project to cabinet but had received no response so far, Mr Somchai said. He added the PAO would continue to campaign against the project, although he admitted it would create jobs for local people.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, October 4, 2000/Phil Round

### **Backyard bird reserve brings back Darters**

For more than a decade it has been believed that the Oriental Darter no longer nests in Thailand. But thanks to a villager in Ban Klong Malakor, Sa Kaew province, a 50-strong colony of the endangered bird is still thriving - to the surprise of the birdwatching community. Uncle Son Sornchandaeng and his wife Somkuan settled down in the area 25 years ago. Unlike other settlers in Ban Klong Malakor, Uncle Son did not turn all of his claimed land into corn fields. Instead, he set aside a part of the original forest to be used as a source of firewood, herbal medicines, mushrooms and other natural products. These days, even though the need for such natural yields is not as great as in the past, the 10-rai (approx. 1.5 ha) patch of wilderness remains, like a cool, shady island in the vast sea of scorching farmland - serving as home to several species of birds, including of course, the Oriental Darter. "It was about seven or eight years ago when big birds like egrets and cormorants began to flock here in large numbers," said the 53-year-old Uncle Son. "I don't mind having them here. These birds need some place to nest

and lay eggs." Villagers in the area are very familiar with "Uncle Son's birds", as well as the fact that the old man has prohibited anyone from harming his winged tenants. But no one realised why they were so special until a couple of months ago when the principal of a nearby school reported to a local conservation group - the Raks Pangsida group - that there were a large number of birds congregating on Uncle Son's land. Representatives of the group then visited the area, took photographs and sent them to the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand in Bangkok. The photos caused great excitement among birdwatchers because they showed several Oriental Darters. "It has long been believed that the species no longer nests in Thailand. The last time the nests of the species were found was 15 years ago at Wat Tan Aen in Ayutthaya province," said Uthai Treesucon, chairman of the Bird Conservation Society. "The species are so rare there are just a few places where you can spot them if you're lucky. And when you do, usually it's just one or two individuals." Uthai conducted a brief survey of the birdlife in Uncle Son's forest patch and in addition to the Oriental Darter, he found a number of Purple Heron, also a rare species. Other birds that nest there include the Little Egret, the Cattle Egret, the Black-crowned Night Heron, the Indian Shag, and the Asian Openbill. In the surrounding farmland, the Black-shouldered Kite, the Plain-backed Sparrow and the Brown Shrike are present. But that's not all: The mango grove behind Uncle Son's house is

home to the Drongo Cuckoo, the Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo and the Spotted Owlet. Thira Saengsuradet, head of the Raks Pangsida group said: "We never knew there was a breeding site of an endangered species in our province. Now that the news of the discovery has spread, a lot of people, both from Sa Kaew and other provinces, are flocking to the area to see the birds. The presence of people can disturb the birds, so visitors are asked to watch the birds only from outside the forested zone; otherwise the birds may be frightened and their nestlings may fall from their nests and die." To make sure this important breeding site receives proper protection, Thira revealed that the Raks Pangsida group has called upon several parties - namely the Bird Conservation Society, the Wildlife Fund of Thailand, the provincial forestry office, and the Sa Kaew governor - to join forces and work out both short-term and long-term measures to conserve the area. "However, for now we've got cooperation from the village headman, who has agreed to help keep an eye on the site. Another thing we're doing is informing the people of Sa Kaew on the importance of the Oriental Darter. If the locals feel the bird is something they can be proud of, they will definitely help protect it," Thira said. "The area is a good place for people to learn about nature. In the future, it would be nice to have an observation tower built so that students and interested people can climb up and watch the birds in the tree canopy. But, of course, that depends on the owner of the land and the local



community," he said, adding the Raks Pangsida group plans to hold a nature camp for school children in the area to raise awareness of the importance of birds in the ecosystem and to sow the seeds of conservation in young hearts. At the moment, despite Uncle Son's constant vigilance, the birds occasionally fall victim to harassment from those who sneak in to shoot at them with air guns. "You don't hear the shots but the birds' alarm calls and their freakish behaviour tell you right away what's happening," the old man said. Another serious threat this breeding site faces is fire: "Villagers habitually burn their farms during the dry season to clear away what remains of the previous crop, and sometimes the fire just gets out of control and spreads into the bird habitat," he added. Uthai, the Bird Conservation Society chairman, commented that the birds were lucky there were people like Uncle Son. "Still, their future will be more secure if they receive better protection. It would be good if this place could be designated a no-hunting zone so the birds could be protected by law," he said. The discovery of Uncle Son's bird sanctuary shows that cooperation and exchange of information between local and national conservation groups is crucial to the protection of the country's natural treasures. It also shows that the greater the number of nature lovers, the better the chances are that new, ecologically-important sites will be found. And sometimes, as in this case, these precious places might just be somebody's backyard.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, October 9, 2000/Phil Round

### Five new National Parks declared

The National Park Committee has approved the declaration of five new national parks: three land parks and two marine. The parks are Nam Tok Klong Kaew in Trat; Phupha Lek which straddles Sakhon Nakhon, Udon Thani and Kalasin provinces; Phu Lanka in Nakhon Phanom; the Phayom archipelago in Ranong and Hat Khanom-Talay Tai archipelago in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Surat Thani. The meeting also agreed to revoke the status for 33 rai (5.25 ha) of Doi Luang national park in Phayao for the construction of a reservoir project.

Meanwhile, the opening of a new 8 km trail two weeks ago is attracting more senior people to attempt treks to the scenic peak of Phu Kradueng mountain park. Suphachai Dolprasit, the park chief, said more people in their late 40s and 50s are visiting the park.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, November 1, 2000

## Vietnam

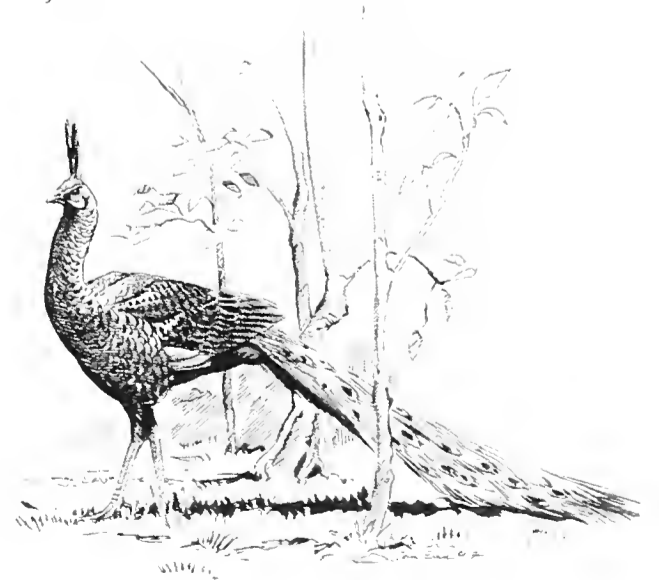
### Mystery Pheasant in Quang Tri

In late February 2000, a pheasant was found by a rattan collector from Trieu Nguyen commune, Quang Tri province. Since its capture, speculation has mounted concerning its identity, to the point that it was thought to be an entirely new species. However, examination by scientists from the BirdLife International Vietnam

Programme and the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI) have confirmed its identity as Imperial Pheasant *Lophura imperialis*.

On 2 June, a BirdLife/FIPI team traveled to Dong Ha to conduct a full examination of the bird. This revealed the pheasant to be a juvenile male, about one year old, undergoing heavy moult. Blood and fresh feather samples were collected and have been sent to Italy to be examined by a genetics expert as part of a DNA study.

Imperial Pheasant, considered to be amongst the most threatened of all pheasants, was found within the boundaries of the proposed Dakrong Nature Reserve, a site of the European Community-funded project 'Expanding the protected areas network in Vietnam for the 21st Century.' BirdLife and FIPI are now concentrating their efforts on conserving the last areas of lowland forest of central Vietnam, home to Imperial Pheasant and other threatened species. A document from Quang Tri FPD states, "It was discovered in secondary lowland forest, within the borders of the proposed Dakrong Nature Reserve. The discovery is therefore further justification for the



Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* by Daniel Cole

establishment of a nature reserve at this site.”

Source: Nguyen Phu Quoc/  
BirdLife Vietnam

### **New areas surveyed**

In the southwest of Gia Lai province, a team from BirdLife and the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI) surveyed Chu Prong district, adjacent to the Cambodian border. This area has until recently been closed to scientists for security reasons. The area is dominated by deciduous forest, with smaller areas of semi-deciduous forest at higher elevations and riverine forest along major watercourses. Natural forest is estimated to cover around 50,000 ha. Logging has now stopped and part of the area has been designated as Watershed Protection Forest. The survey found that the area supports high levels of mammal diversity, including Eld's Deer, Gaur, Banteng, Tiger, Dhole and Golden Jackal. The area also supports a number of bird species of conservation importance, including Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilis javanicus*, Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*, Germain's Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron germaini*, Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus*, Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichhyaetus* and Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*. The results of the survey will be presented as a feasibility study and submitted to Gia Lai Provincial People's Committee - the first step in securing protected areas status. The feasibility study will be published later this year.

The survey of southeastern Gia Lai province focussed on an extensive area of lowland forest, perhaps 100,000 ha in

extent, in A Yun Pa and Krong Pa districts. This area represents one of the most extensive contiguous areas of lowland forest remaining in Vietnam. The area is situated in the transition zone between deciduous forest and semi-evergreen forest although much of the fauna of the area appears to be characteristic of deciduous forest, such as Silvered Langur.

Unfortunately, there do not appear to be any significant populations of large mammals and there is evidence that the area has been subjected to heavy hunting pressure in the past. Nonetheless, the area supports several bird species of conservation importance including significant numbers of Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus*, Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea*, Siamese Fireback *Lophura diardi* and River Lapwing *Vanellus dubauctelii*. The results of the survey will be published later this year.

Source: Nguyen Phu Quoc/  
BirdLife Vietnam

### **National Highway threatens 10 protected areas**

Leading environmental groups say a national highway project in Vietnam poses a serious threat to endangered species and construction has begun without necessary international-standard studies. Five groups, including the Worldwide Fund for Nature said in a joint statement that the Ho Chi Minh Highway could have serious environmental consequences. They called for work in or near protected areas to be postponed until a full international environmental assessment had been carried out and results integrated into the plan. Construction of the

highway, which international donors had hoped would remain a pipe dream because of its cost, began in April. It will eventually run 1,690 km (1,056 miles) from near Hanoi in the north to Ho Chi Minh City in the south. The budget for phase one has been put at \$380 million, but no final cost estimate has been made public. The road will follow parts of the legendary Ho Chi Minh Trail named after Vietnam's independence hero; a maze of jungle tracks used to move men and supplies from communist North Vietnam to U.S. backed South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. "Several aspects of the planned Ho Chi Minh National Highway have raised considerable concerns," the environmentalists' statement said, "in particular, plans for construction and upgrading existing roads in and adjacent to protected areas."

It said the road would affect ten such areas, including national parks and nature reserves, many of which had been cited as priority conservation sites in a 1995 action plan. They said Vietnam's oldest national park, Cuc Phuong, which was inaugurated by Ho Chi Minh was under immediate threat as construction had already started to the west of it. They said the park is a global centre for plant diversity and home to Delacour's Langur, a critically endangered primate.

Source: Reuters, August 15th 2000

# Gurney's Pitta Campaign update

— November 2000

This report summarises the progress of the campaign from the time of the update published on p 42 & 43 of Bulletin 31- Spring 2000. For ease of understanding it is recommended that reference is made to this previous report.

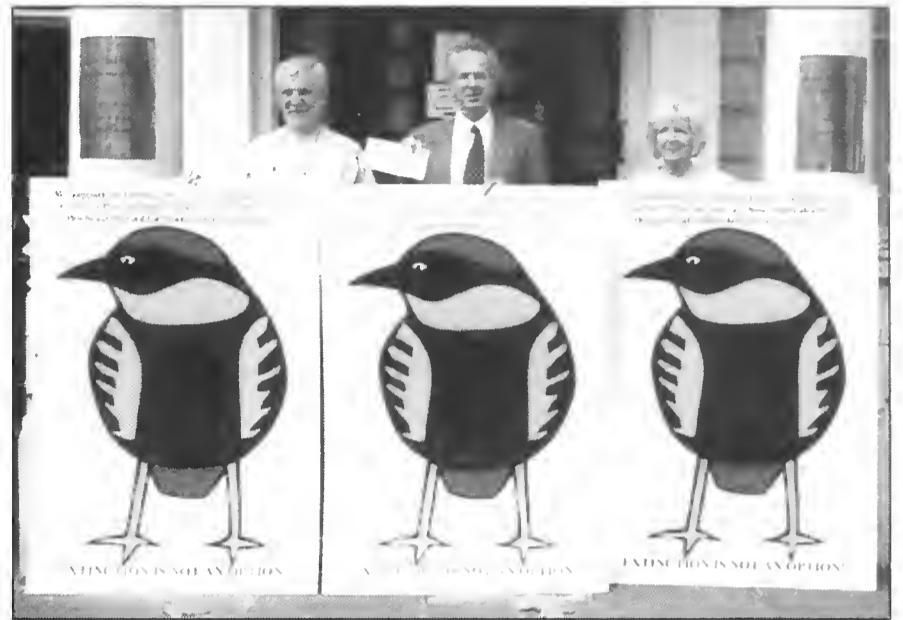
Today the OBC continues to be the main outside agent trying to act to protect the Khao Nor Chuchi [KNC] site. Until very recently there has been little reaction or response from the Thai authorities responsible. Despite the promises made to the OBC team in April 2000 the Krabi Provincial Government did not take steps to reactivate the steering committee which had been set up as recommended by the DANCED funded project for the conservation and development of the site.

## Position at KNC site

In mid June, the author revisited KNC and accompanied Yothin Meekaeo during the final stages of the OBC sponsored survey of the number of Gurney's Pitta remaining in the area. It was concluded that about 12 pairs remain in 2000 and five nests were located. More than half the birds are nesting outside the Wild Life Sanctuary [WLS] boundary. The last major survey was undertaken in 1997 when it was also estimated that about 12 pairs remained and a little comfort can be taken that there has been no further decline. The Club's thanks go to Yothin Meekaeo for the field work and to Philip Round for supervising the project. Council would again like to thank *Club 300 Sweden* for providing the funding.

During the June site visit the lack of gun shots and lack of new areas of encroachment was encouraging. Later, notices were posted on recent clearances stating that they were illegal. This action is unprecedented and during the latter part of the 2000 dry season, illegal clearance virtually ceased.

This improvement in the state of affairs was due to the presence of a Royal Forestry Department [RFD] task force, assembled as a result of investigations by Privy Councillor Amipol acting on behalf of His Majesty the King. The intervention was a result of lobbying efforts



Brian Sykes, Nigel Collar and Margaret Sykes with the petition

started at the BirdLife Conference in 1999. Sadly it was only authorised to operate for a limited period and operations have now ceased with no immediate prospect of resumption. A very constructive meeting was held with Privy Councillor Amipol in September during which the thanks of the Club for the investigation he had carried out and the benefits it had achieved were expressed.

## Publicity and Press Campaigns

Regrettably, despite intensive efforts by Friends of the Earth's [FoE] Tony Juniper after his visit to KNC in April, the UK press response was rather disappointing. Eventually *The Guardian* ran an article, BBC Wildlife magazine [July] carried a short piece and Marcus Kohler and Phil Round were interviewed by BBC World Service, but there was no reaction in Thailand.

OBC Council determined to raise the profile of the campaign during the British Bird Watching Fair [BBWF] by means of a petition which would subsequently be presented at the U.K.Thai Embassy. More than 3500 signatures were collected on a 'giant' 1.5m high Gurney's Pitta during the Fair including those of leading figures in British ornithology and conservation [see Club news for further details]. The petition was delivered to the Thai Embassy by OBC Council members led by Chairman Nigel Collar during October, and in the meantime the publicity



Nigel Collar handing over the petition and letter at the Thai Embassy

already generated had started to have some impact in Thailand.

A press forum under the auspices of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand [FCCT] was held in Bangkok during late August thanks to the help of Denis Gray, the Chief of Bureau of Associated Press in Thailand. The successful BBWF campaign acted as a good springboard for the FCCT meeting. A panel of 4 speakers formed the basis of the programme. The author gave a foreign NGO's perspective, Phil Round spoke about the DANCED project, Tony Lynam [WCS] spoke on other conservation issues in Thailand and Dr Schwann Tunhikorn [Head of Wildlife Conservation Division] spoke on behalf of the RFD. The presentations and floor discussion varied in content/quality and no new initiatives were adopted. The OBC was accused of 'unfair criticism' by the RFD.

The immediate aftermath was another BBC World Service interview with Phil Round, and several correspondents indicated they would prepare copy for English language publications.

With assistance from Denis Gray and Phil Round contacts were made with the Thai language press. The most fruitful was an OBC interview with a national daily 'Khao Sod'. This led to front page coverage for the Gurney's Pitta issue in the controversial, large circulation, popular paper during September. The paper laid the blame for the decline of the species squarely at the door of the RFD. Dr Schwann responded, disputing the facts of the declining Pitta

population and the paper interviewed Uthai Treesucon [Chairman of Bird Conservation Society Thailand] who strongly supported the OBC population data and stated that the alleged OBC criticism was not destructive. He added that Thai authorities / NGOs should accept offers of help from foreign NGOs.

A TV debate/discussion on conservation was staged between RFD Director-General Dr Plodprasop Suraswadi and Wild Life Fund Thailand [WFT] Secretary Surapon Duangkhae. Nothing very controversial came out of this, but again KNC featured in the discussion and they made an informal agreement to visit KNC together. The RFD admitted that they had acted as a result of Royal intervention and further action against forest encroachers was: "promised for November." Finally the RFD Director-General announced that the RFD would annexe the remaining 8000 rai of National Reserve Forest with KNC as the conservation area for Gurney's Pitta. This may be a significant announcement, but the RFD has in the past made announcements to take the heat out of a situation and then not taken the action promised. OBC will monitor developments in the coming dry season.

### WFT project proposal

Since April, several meetings have been held with Surapon Duangkhae to discuss proposals for WFT involvement. WFT is a Thai organisation held in some respect because it has had considerable success in involving the local community in conservation.

The project proposal is essentially a community-orientated project targeted at finding ways to secure a change in attitude to conservation of key areas. It involves investigating the feasibility of creating forest guardians, supporting amenable existing settlers, 'buying out' those who will not co-operate, and enhancing income to villagers from tourism [where possible; eco-tourism will not make a big economic impact in KNC].

If the project goes ahead, it will require significant funding [from OBC]. It is generally agreed that the status of a foreign NGO would be significantly enhanced [both locally & in the Thai media] if it is known to be supporting the work of a Thai NGO [without direct intervention of putting foreign nationals on the ground] particularly one under Royal patronage.

## Forest Restoration Research Unit project

The 'FORRU' project based at Chiang Mai University has been visited. This forest restoration project has progressed to practical trials. The field project is in the hands of Thai graduates trained within the unit. They have accumulated practical experience of working with a local community. Their accumulated knowledge is a resource which may be invaluable if restoration becomes important at KNC. Members of the FORRU team have benefited from an OBC small grant.

## OBC 'Forest Guardians'

This proposal to support a 'bird watchers warden' at KNC was discussed at length in Bulletin 31. It continues to move forward, although it may be hampered by the present poor relations between OBC and the RFD. Following recent events, Council believes even more strongly that visiting birdwatchers must be seen to be 'self-policing' so that it cannot be claimed that it is birdwatchers who are responsible for any decline in the pitta population. All OBC Thai friends and contacts are in favour of the proposal. Several candidates have come forward.

## Thai NGO Umbrella organisation

OBC member John Parr has been promoting the formation of a 'Conservation Forum' made up of several of the most important NGOs in Thailand to act as a focus for conservation in Thailand. In principle this is a good idea if there is a commitment by the NGOs to agree terms of reference and set up some achievable targets/objectives [e.g. Campaign for Gurney's Pitta]. The OBC supports the setting up of an effective conservation NGO Umbrella organisation which

would be of value to foreign NGOs seeking to understand the Thai conservation situation/links in Thailand.

OBC will continue to focus on the following:

- **Continue to pressurise the RFD to do its job and protect the forest at KNC.**
- **Continue contacts with Thai press/media, feed in further comments from overseas.**
- **Back community orientated projects targeted at finding ways to secure change in attitude to conservation of key areas**
- **Continue surveillance at site.**

OBC Council would like to thank Philip Round and Dr Samaisukh Sophasan for giving freely of their time and experience; their help in making contacts and arranging meetings, and advice on many aspects of the campaign has been invaluable. Uthai Treesucon, Kamol & Patcharee Komolphalin and John Parr have been equally free with their advice and support.

The author has planned a further visit during November 2000 to follow up these initiatives, visit KNC site and hold discussions with interested parties within Thailand.

OBC Council would once again like to take the opportunity to thank all those members who have helped so far in any way. Your support is of vital importance and continues to be most encouraging. Further pledges and donations will be gratefully received.

Birders visiting the site are reminded that the use of tape playback to lure in Gurney's Pitta is prohibited at Khao Nor Chuchi

*Brian Sykes, OBC Secretary*

### Erratum

In issue 26 of the *Bulletin*, the Free Press article on China contained an error: the sentence "Large numbers of Relict Gulls breeding on Happy Island, China, in August 1974" should have read "Large numbers of Relict Gulls on Happy Island...". There are no breeding records from the Chinese coast.



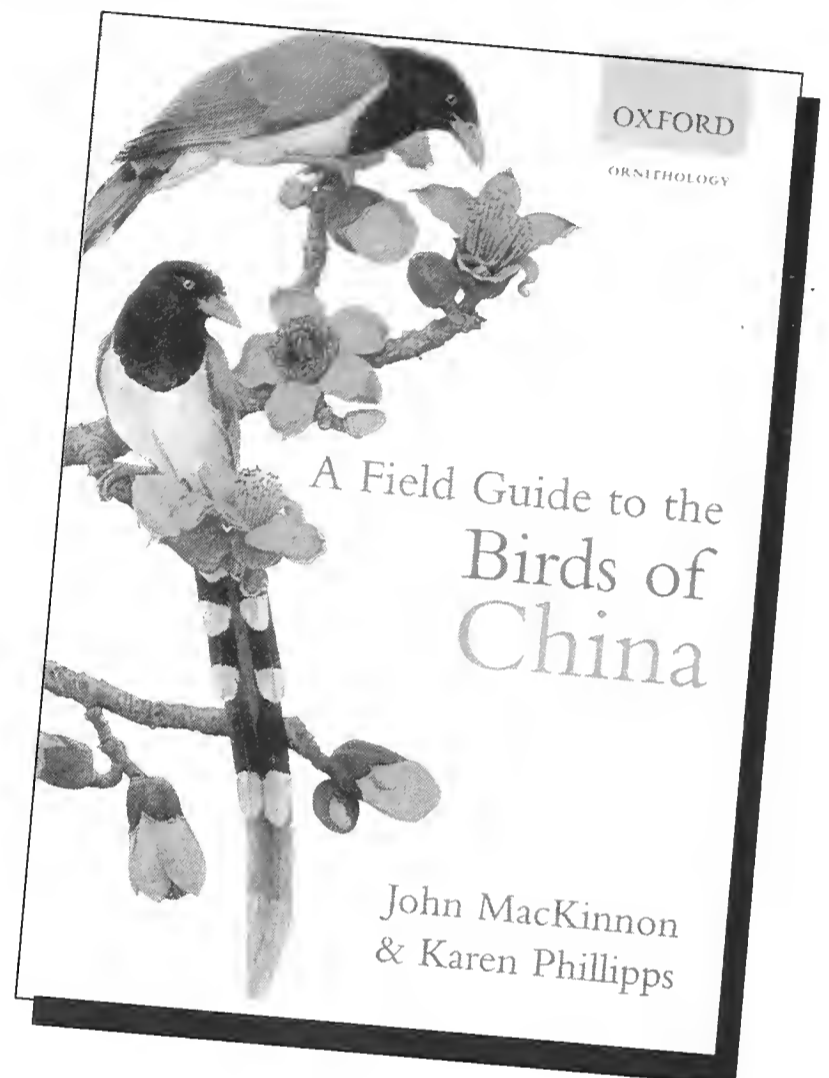
## Recently Published

### SPECIAL REVIEW

**A Field Guide to the Birds of China.** By John MacKinnon and Karen Phillipps, in collaboration with He Fen-qi. Illustrations by Karen Phillipps and David Showler. Distribution maps by David MacKinnon. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000. xiii + 586 pp. 128 colour plates. Hardback £60.00, ISBN 0-19-854940-7; paperback £29.99, ISBN 0-19-854941-5.

There can hardly be any readers of this Bulletin who are not acutely aware of the long-held need for a good field guide to the birds of China. The introduction to this long-anticipated book states (p. 1): "this guide attempts to fill the gap and will be published in both English and Chinese". There are of course no rules as to what a field guide is or does, but these days, field guides are expected to allow the user to correctly identify most birds encountered in the field, provide correct and up-to-date comparative information for a variety of uses, and provide range maps that inform users where and when they are likely to find a given species, and at least roughly where it has been recorded. All this has to be compacted down to a portable size. The purpose of this review is primarily to evaluate how effectively MacKinnon and Phillipps (M & P) can be expected to serve its intended purpose.

*The Plates.* Field guides are now judged more on their plates than any other aspect, and a huge amount of time and effort must have gone into depicting all the bird species of China; this was a daunting undertaking to say the least, for which the artists deserve plaudits. For many species, the illustrations herein *are* the best ever produced, and for some they are probably the first in a modern, readily available English-language source. And, for many species, they are reasonably accurate and adequate for field identification. However, difficult species are typically treated poorly, and the need for illustrations of these that even give a chance for correct field identification unfortunately remains as great as ever. Try having someone cover the plate caption and other clues, and then identify species 973 on Plate 93, using



any other form of reference material. Now try 937 on Plate 94; then 957 and 959 on Plate 96. Stumped? If so, take heart. These, as well as many other sylviid warblers, are simply unidentifiable as depicted. Another problem is the lack of comparability between the styles of the two artists, or even those by the same artist. Compare the Mountain Tailorbird (Plate 99) with the Broad-billed Warbler (Plate 100). How many future misidentifications will be caused by users who are unaware, due to these illustrations, of the confusing superficial similarity of these two species? Conversely, on Plate 104, the Buff-breasted Babbler and the Spot-throated Babbler look practically identical, and out of the context of the plate, I might not even have guessed correctly as to their family.

The plates in M & P typically suffer in comparison to those in many other recent field guides and reference books, and yet in numerous cases they seem derived from other works,

adopting similar postures and illustrative styles. Awkwardness of form and handling of colour and pattern is the norm. Some of the warblers (Plates 97 and 99) have impossibly curved distal tarsi. The *Syrrhaptes* sandgrouse (Plate 35) are depicted as having three distinctly separate forward-pointing toes (e.g. a *Pterocles*-type foot), when in fact they have joined toes. One attractive figure is that of the Eurasian Eagle Owl, but it seems very like that in Jonsson (1993: 315), except that in M & P it is labelled *hemachalana*, a pale Central Asiatic race, which creates a sense of false accuracy, since it does not match descriptions of that race.

The decisions that led to the current plate composition seem mysterious. What can have led to the Grey-necked Bunting being located on Plate 126, separated by two plates from the extremely similar Ortolan, when neither resemble anything on their respective plates (not to mention the misleadingly Ortolan-like yellowish throat and malar of the Grey-necked Bunting)? Likewise, why are Godlewski's and Rock Buntings similarly isolated from one another, despite their great resemblance and former treatment as conspecific? And how on earth did the treecreepers end up on Plate 15 with the barbets? Fortunately the index leads you to them, but only if you remember to look under 'treecreepers' and not just 'creepers'.

The breeding Intermediate Egret of the Asian nominate race should show an entirely black bill with a greenish-yellow face; its legs should also be all-black, and its pectoral and scapular plumes should be longer. To be fair, there is a lot of confusion on the matter of soft-part colours for this taxon in other sources, but photos of it abound. The pittas (Plate 64) are shown as being grotesquely plump but with relatively tiny legs, quite unlike reality. Some of the illustrations are exceptionally crudely rendered, such as the adult Common Starling and the juvenile Rosy Starling, both species for which abundant photographic material is available. The Tibetan Lark (alternatively named Long-billed Lark; Plate 113) shows the standard triangular *Melanocorypha* bill rather than the fairly long, distinctly curved bill it should have. On Plate 117, the head figure of a White Wagtail labelled as race *alboides* can be no permutation of this race or even species; instead it seems derived from an illustration or photo of the African Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp*, although the white neck patch was left off.

Many distinctive races have not been illustrated, for example the distinctive Taiwanese

race of the Maroon Oriole; the text says only that it has the "maroon feathers basally crimson rather than white of other races". This does not at all convey the idea that the male is basically bright red and black rather than dark maroon and black, and it is not even vaguely correct; in both taxa the feathers are grey-based, white-centred, and red- or maroon-tipped. Only a single Silver Pheasant of each sex is illustrated (Plate 4); although the female of the Hainan race is described in the text (p. 47) as having a "black upper back with white shaft streaks and black underparts spotted white", readers of this description who have not seen skins of females of this taxon will have no inkling as to its extremely distinct plumage.

The rosefinches are shown (Plates 122-123) as all being about the same size and shape. This homogeneity has no basis in reality; the two great rosefinches should be far larger than most of the others on the plate. The "Red-faced" [=Red-fronted] Rosefinch, in fact an aberrant large species with a long, narrow-based bill, a full, rounded tail, and a long body with fluffy plumage, shows none of these characters in M & P. The female Streaked Rosefinch should be virtually identical in plumage, but *not* shape, to the female Red-fronted; instead the reverse situation is depicted. Strangely, the only rosefinch to depart from this standard form is the male Common Rosefinch, which in its exuberant singing pose shows a startlingly curved, parrot-like bill, unlike the quite normal-billed female.

A similar lack of characterisation occurs among the snowfinches (Plate 116), which are shown as all being very much of a kind. In fact, they are quite diverse, some having fairly long bills and others stubby ones; some having long claws, another short heavy curved ones, and the others tiny feet and claws. The Plain-backed Snowfinch is also shown as having the mantle almost as heavily marked as that of the Rufous-necked Snowfinch, although that of the former should be unmarked, while the latter is heavily streaked. The White-rumped Snowfinch should have a longer, strongly graduated tail, unlike all the others. Such problems can often be traced to earlier illustrators' work, pointing to the desirability of careful study of specimens rather than perpetuation of previous inaccuracies.

The colours of one of the artists' work (Phillipps) tend to the garish, while those of the other (Showler) are often extremely washed out. Particularly alarming are the colours of some

pigeons, above all the Pale-capped Pigeon (Plate 28), actually dark chestnut above with touches of vinous and green, but which looks here as if it could burn a hole in the page. The green pigeons (Plate 30) show blocks of gaudy colour rather than the beautiful, subtle shadings of reality; some more inexperienced birders are likely to be disappointed and confused when they encounter the real thing.

Do the illustrations achieve their goal? In large part, yes. I would caution against using them as the sole basis for identification of all but the more obvious species, or using them at all for identification of the most difficult species. But one could probably correctly identify a fairly high percentage of what is seen based on these illustrations, especially if used advisedly in conjunction with other sources. Get a second, better yet a third, opinion!

*Typographical and Organisational Errors.* Upon opening this book, one is assailed by obvious errors; they are legion. Evidently the copy-editing and proofing processes were shortchanged. A small sample of the presumably small percentage that I have noted is presented here: on page iv, MacKinnon is given as Mackinnon; on plate 76, a legend for [*Tarsiger*] *indicus* has gone astray, and is situated beneath the Blue-fronted Robin; on Plate 113 (but not in the text), the interesting name "Horned Skylark" is used for *Eremophila alpestris*. Meyer de Schauensee (1984) is correctly listed under "M" in the index, but is variously cited in the text. On p. 478, the race of House Sparrow *Passer domesticus parkini* is referred to at least four times as *partini*, and not at all as *parkini*.

In Appendix 3, "Birds expected or recorded from areas of Arunachal Pradesh claimed by China but not described in text", the Rufous-rumped Grassbird is listed, inexplicably so as this species has a full text account as well as a map and illustration on Plate 95. This appendix also lists the Common Hawk Cuckoo, which not only has an illustration, map, and text account, but the map (opposite Plate 20) does not show its occurrence in or even near China, while the text indicates "Common up to 1200 m in SE Xizang". Although the Crimson-browed Finch is depicted on Plate 123, its caption and map are opposite Plate 121. The name "Red-faced" Rosefinch is an ironically appropriate innovation used only in the map/plate caption for the Red-fronted Rosefinch, and not mentioned in the text or index.

*Maps.* Generating range maps, particularly for little-known parts of the world, is riddled with problems, and maps are all too often taken as authoritative, rather than as visual aids. After all, range maps *look* convincing. However, shaded or tone maps are full of potentially misleading and often outright erroneous information that will be taken as gospel by users, and that is likely to form the basis for all sorts of scientific conclusions and conservation decisions, in the absence of another source deemed more authoritative. They will also be copied outright into future books. Readers unconvinced that map-making is inherently problematic are hereby challenged to try making their own range maps. Pick a few species at random and construct maps, the accuracy of which you can vouch for, and that you would be comfortable foisting upon birders, ornithologists, and policy-makers. Take your time.... Not so easy or straightforward, is it? Making range maps is like being a bird illustrator, only without the talent, in that it forces one to make decisions on matters for which key data are missing, equivocal, or contradictory. Determining whether a species is, for example, resident across a given area may simply be impossible based on present data, and yet the map remains unfinished until a best guess (maybe the wrong one) is made.

What does the above have to do with this book? In M & P, range maps share centre stage with the plates, being situated opposite them in place of facing page notes. The idea implemented here of providing extralimital ranges for the countries enclosed within the square drawn around China's borders is a good one, as it should provide context and expanded applicability. Unfortunately and inexplicably, many of the maps for extralimital areas are far less accurate than those in other readily available sources. Thus the sorts of pitfalls and biases alluded to above that apply to even the most conscientiously made maps cannot be the reason that these maps are so often faulty; it could only have been haste, carelessness, and/or ignorance.

For illustrative purposes I made a list of some passerines for which the ranges are grossly in error, mainly for India and Myanmar. I have not noted species for which the ranges are only slightly off, or for which the evidence could possibly be interpreted as depicted, or for which recent range extensions might account for the disparities. These include: Ultramarine Flycatcher (Plate 80), extensive wintering range in northern India not shown; Hill Myna (Plate 85), not shown



for north-eastern peninsular India (same problem for Pale-chinned Flycatcher Plate 81); Stripe-throated Bulbul (Plate 90), not shown for the range of the race in southern Myanmar; Hume's Short-toed Lark (Plate 113), entire range shown as breeding only, implying wrongly that it winters entirely somewhere extraliminally; Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush (Plate 103), shown as occurring all across the eastern Himalayas, when only sight-recorded from Arunachal Pradesh; Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler (Plate 105), the map does not include any of the eastern Himalayan range of the nominate [incidentally the nominate form erroneously illustrated is quite distinct in plumage from the form that must occur in China]; Chinese Babax (Plate 107), shown as inhabiting all of central Myanmar; Giant Babax (Plate 107), shown as occurring well into Arunachal Pradesh, although not yet definitely recorded (this is also the case for several other species); Striated Yuhina (Plate 110), shown as entirely missing from the Himalayas; White-bellied Yuhina (Plate 110), shown as sub-Himalayan only; Ashy Woodswallow (Plate 119), shown as restricted within India to the east coast; Black-throated Weaver (Plate 116), shown as continuing broadly from eastern India right across north-central Myanmar, and into southern China, although the sole mention of this species from Myanmar is probably a mistake dating from the mid-1800s, and its presence in China equally unsupported; White-winged Snowfinch (Plate 116), the range is far too extensive, wrongly including Kashmir and Ladakh, probably due to its sometime treatment as conspecific with Tibetan Snowfinch, but even that taxon does not occur in Kashmir proper; Tibetan Siskin (Plate 120), shown in all of north-eastern India, although scarce and local only in the Himalayas, and not even in the hills south of the Brahmaputra; Red Crossbill (Plate 121), shown as occurring right across the plains of northern India, although a scarce, entirely Himalayan species in the subcontinent; Scarlet Finch (Plate 121), shown in the plains of Assam (an error common to numerous species); Three-banded Rosefinch (Plate 123), shown in Assam, but in the subcontinent only sight-recorded once, in Bhutan; Crimson-browed Finch (Plate 123), within India, only shown as occurring in eastern Arunachal Pradesh and Assam (opposite Plate 121).

What about ranges in China, obviously the core function of the maps? According to the acknowledgements (p. xiii), "over 6000 digital

point data records of birds in China" were provided from all available Chinese books and records by the China Endangered Species Unit, a laudable example of cooperation. Presumably this should mean that the range maps are reasonably accurate and up-to-date for China. Comparisons I made with the randomly chosen family Columbidae showed that the maps in M & P for this group are essentially faithful to those in Cheng (1987). A comparison of maps for the same family with those for Korea in Won (1996) shows minor disparities, and compared with maps for the former USSR in Flint *et al.* (1984), M & P represent the ranges for these countries similarly. This exercise suggests that most of the maps for China in M & P are likely to be as good as those in Cheng (1987), but for the rarer species for which Cheng did not plot points, they may be less accurate; and for other countries to the north and east of China, they are likely to occasionally misrepresent known ranges somewhat.

Do these maps accomplish their purpose? Many probably are reasonably accurate. Those of the Himalayan Greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides* and the Black-headed Greenfinch *C. ambigua* almost correctly depict the very limited area of approach of these two species, despite considerable confusion in other sources. Ironically, however, this minor triumph is tarnished by M & P's failure to correct their own textual description (p. 498) of the range of nominate *spinoides*, despite their having pointed out the erroneous range map in Clement *et al.* (1993). Quite a few maps probably do provide a reasonably fair representation of a species' range and residential status, and thus this indeterminate percentage could be said to have succeeded in its mission. Where the maps are demonstrably inaccurate, they have failed at least in the portion of the range in question. Sometimes this is not of great importance; however, the sloppiness of these maps often greatly exaggerates the size of the range of sensitive range-restricted species. Where they encompass entirely the wrong sort of habitat, e.g. the broad plains of Assam rather than the high mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, the maps can lead to misapprehension of those species' ranges and requirements.

*General.* The text accounts are in a fairly standard format, if overly brief, and with too much white space. For example, soft part colours are given but each subheading (e.g. iris, bill, feet) is followed by a long dash, which when multiplied

by the number of species involved must amount to wasted space. Most birders who lug a book of this size in the field would probably prefer more information per unit size.

Every book has errors. Typographical errors, reversed captions, and mislabelled figures happen at all stages, and sometimes they are beyond the authors' control. Errors of fact result from innocent copying of the errors of others, from one's own misjudgments, inadequate research, or lack of knowledge, and from simple but persistent human error, to name but a few sources. Even the coordination of all aspects of such a book so that the various parts match up is unimaginably tedious. But in a well-produced book, the errors reveal themselves gradually to knowledgeable readers, but the element of trust in the overall authoritativeness of the book remains intact. However, the quantity of readily found, highly correctable errors in M & P lead to a lack of confidence in all aspects of its production. How valuable is a compendium of information if there is a high probability that any given element will be incorrect?

The maps, although they are placed opposite the plates, are not organised in the same sequence, as the numbers are those in which the text accounts appear. With no facing notes to at least point out salient identification characters, the risk of misidentification based on these plates, especially if disassociated from the text, is great. Even the best field guides cannot depict all the plumages and variations needed for accurate identification of many difficult species, and the facing notes should steer the user to the right features for identification. Naïve users especially will often end up with wrong identifications by focusing on the wrong characters, and they or those accepting their records may never be the wiser.

The hardback version of the book has a sturdy cover, and it is conveniently sized. The paper quality is good, but the binding of the review copy has not held up even to light office use. The maps on the endpapers lack coordinates; the habitat map on the front endpapers looks pixelated, and is essentially unlabelled except for the habitat colour codes. The rear endpapers display a

reasonably useful map of place names within China, on which I had little difficulty locating the several sites I sought.

The challenge this book leaves to someone else is not an inconsiderable one. Just to produce responsible maps for the region will be a monumental task. Museum collections (some of them surely unpublished) from China are scattered all over the world; new data from them need to be incorporated, while the published data that appear in Cheng's various works need in some cases to be re-evaluated. The recent proliferation of records from birders needs to be dealt with advisedly. The job of accurately painting all the distinctive forms and plumages of Chinese birds based on thorough research is immense beyond the comprehension of all but those who have tried something comparable. This cannot effectively be done without vast amounts of time and effort spent in major museums, an expensive proposition to say the least, and well beyond the means of most.

When Meyer de Schauensee (1984) first appeared, I vaguely recollect general rejoicing among ornithologists, despite the fact that it is a far less complete field guide than M & P. But times have changed; China's birds are now known in life to many, and field guide standards and expectations are higher. To some extent, M & P does form a stopgap measure until something more authoritative can be produced, but it is unfortunate that this book was not executed with sufficient care so that it could have been more than that.

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Pamela C. Rasmussen

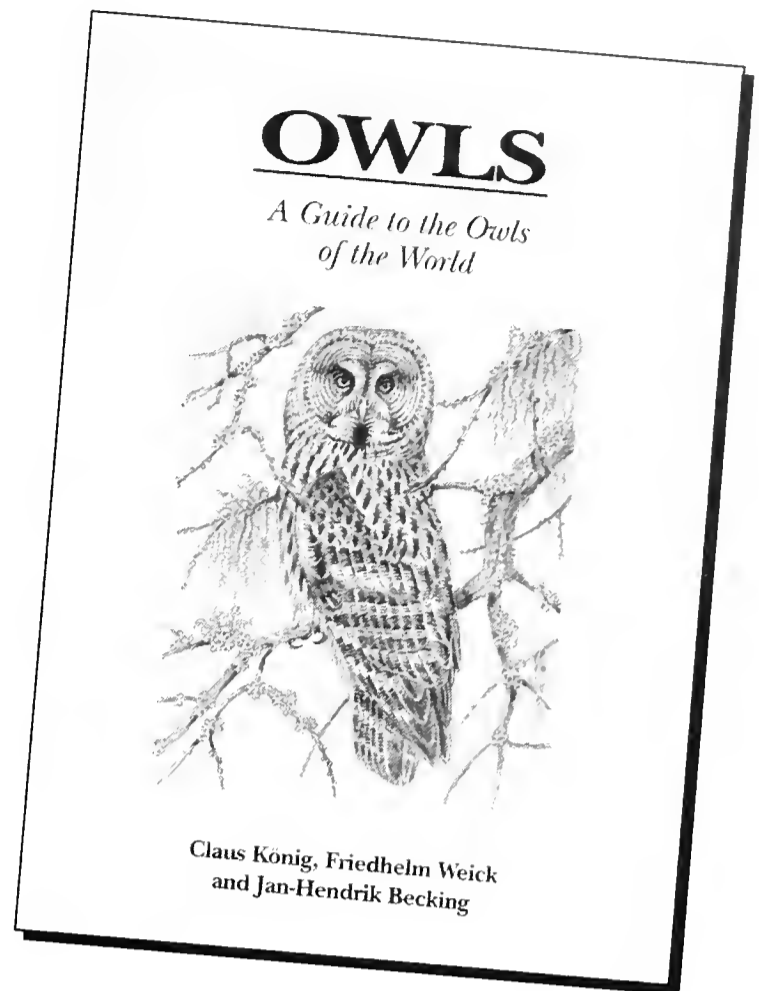
**Owls: A Guide to the Owls of the World.** By Claus König, Friedhelm Weick and Jan-Hendrik Becking. Pica Press, Robertsbridge, 1999. 462 pp. 64 colour plates. £35.00. ISBN 1-873403-74-7.

This book is the first to deal individually with all known owl species in the world, some 212 in all, according to the authors. The book is in three main sections. The first gives a brief overview of the general biology of owls, their morphology, anatomy, behaviour, ecology and taxonomy; the second section, consisting of 64 colour plates, depicts each species in different plumages; and the third is devoted to the individual species accounts, together with range maps.

The authors are well-equipped to produce a book of this type, as all have life-long, first-hand experience of their subject matter. Claus König is Director (and Curator of birds) at the Stuttgart Museum of Natural History, and has studied owls for more than 30 years, especially their vocalisations; Friedhelm Weick is a professional wildlife artist, known especially for his depictions of birds of prey; while Jan-Hendrik Becking is a plant physiologist, but with a particular interest in owls, especially of the Oriental and Australasian regions.

In the introductory section, owl taxonomy and phylogeny are discussed in some depth, and emphasis is placed on the value of vocalisations in taxonomy and species definition. This section also contains a special chapter by Michael Wink and Petra Heidrich who summarise their findings on owl phylogeny based on analyses of mitochondrial DNA. Among many other interesting insights, their findings support the placement of *Nyctea* and *Ketupa* in *Bubo*, and of *Ciccaba* in *Strix*. As the authors stress, there are many other problems in owl phylogeny that could be resolved if appropriate blood samples became available.

The second section gives field-guide-type depictions of all known species, their main colour morphs and more distinctive subspecies, and in some cases also nestling plumages. Opposite each plate is a page of text summarising the geographical range, habitat and main field marks for use in identification. The paintings show clearly the main differences between closely related species. However, to my eyes, the background colour of many species seems



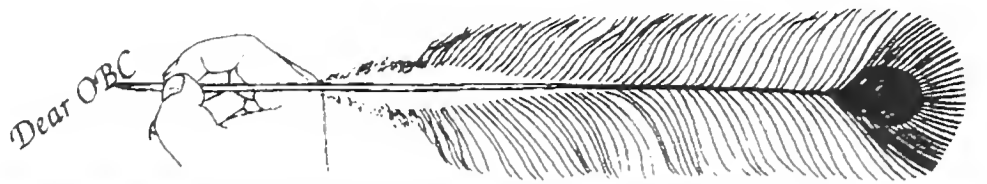
washed out and the markings rather exaggerated, so the birds appear more contrasting than in life.

The third section gives around 1-2 tightly written pages of text on each species, with paragraphs on identification, vocalisations, distribution (with a map showing summer and winter ranges), movements, habitat, description, measurements and weights, geographical variation, habits, food, breeding, status and conservation, remarks and references. This is the main section of the book and, to judge from the acknowledgements, the authors have gone to some trouble to include previously unpublished information and comments on little-known species from around the world. To complement the book, a CD will also be published, with recordings of the vocalisations of about 90% of all known owl species, some recorded for the first time.

It will be clear by now that this book has much to offer, especially for owl enthusiasts. Overall, I felt the authors have done a good job in briefly summarising existing information, and particularly in putting together what little is known of the many tropical species, and in emphasising recent findings from bioacoustics and molecular biology. The book is nicely produced and reasonably priced.

I. Newton

# To the Editor



## A clutch of published distribution-map errors concerning birds in Laos

The recently published *A field guide to the birds of China*<sup>1</sup> presents geographical distribution maps for almost all 1300+ species covered. These maps include large areas of neighbouring countries. I am not qualified to comment on species distributions within China, but within the neighbouring countries the mapped distribution for many bird species is at variance with published literature. Until an authoritative field guide to Chinese birds is published, this book is likely to be used widely, and there is a danger that these maps will foment considerable confusion on bird distribution in the region. For example, there are already messages coming into the email group 'Oriental Birding' treating these maps as though the information within them can be relied upon. It cannot be, and I have examined the maps with specific reference to Laos, in order to set the record straight at least for that one country.

I know of neither published records nor acceptable unpublished reports of the following 61 species (following MacKinnon and Phillipps's taxonomic limits) mapped for Laos: Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, \*Northern Shoveler *A. clypeata*, Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, \*Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*, \*Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hyperythrus*, Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi*, Grass Owl *Tyto capensis*, Common Crane *Grus grus*, Black-necked Crane *G. nigricollis*, Band-bellied Crake *Porzana paykullii*, Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*, Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*, Plain-backed Thrush *Zoothera mollissima*, Grey-backed Thrush *Turdus hortulorum*, Gould's Shortwing *Brachypteryx stellata*, Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui*, Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*, Pale-chinned Flycatcher *Cyornis poliogenys*, Golden Bush Robin *Tarsiger chrysaenus*, White-browed Bush Robin *T. indicus*, Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri*, Spotted Forktail *E. maculatus*, Red-billed Starling *Sturnus sericeus*, White-cheeked Starling *S. cineraceus*, Eurasian Crag

Martin *Hirundo rupestris*, White-throated Bulbul *Alophoixus flaveolus*, Striated Prinia *Prinia criniger*, Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler *Cettia acanthizoides*, \*Brown Bush Warbler *Bradypterus luteoventris*, \*White-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus affinis*, \*Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*, White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*, Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *G. rufogularis*, Blue-winged Laughingthrush *G. squamatus*, Scaly Laughingthrush *G. subunicolor*, Black-faced Laughingthrush *G. affinis*, Red-winged Laughingthrush *G. formosus*, Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus superciliaris*, Long-tailed Wren Babbler *Spelaornis chocolatinus*, Chinese Babax *Babax lanceolatus*, Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*, Black-headed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthins rufiventer*, Streaked Barwing *Actinodura souliei*, Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis*, White-browed Fulvetta *A. vinipectus*, \*Streak-throated Fulvetta *A. cinereiceps*, Dusky Fulvetta *A. brunnea*, Rufous-vented Yuhina *Yuhina occipitalis*, Ashy-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis alphonisannus*, Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus*, Water Pipit *A. spinoletta*, Buff-bellied Pipit *A. rubescens*, Streaked Weaver *Plocens manyar*, Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, Grey-capped Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica* and Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis*. These species are all mapped unambiguously for Laos, sometimes across the entire portion of the country portrayed on the map (e.g. Eastern Curlew). An additional 26 species for which I know of no previous records are indicated as of marginal occurrence in Laos. Some of these might stem from out-of-register printing, but given the generally high print quality of the book, I suspect with most of the species, the printing of the map is as intended. These species are: Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola*, Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Darjeeling Woodpecker *Dendrocopos darjellensis*, Derbyan Parakeet *Psittacula derbiana*, Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*, Dusky Eagle Owl *B. coromandus*, Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*, Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*, Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*, Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Black-necked Grebe *P. nigricollis*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, House Crow *Corvus splendens*, Pale Thrush *Turdus pallidus*, Dusky Thrush *T. naumanni*, Giant Nuthatch *Sitta magna*, Collared

Finchbill *Spizixos semitorques*, Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*, \*Masked Laughingthrush *Garrulax perspicillatus*, Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *G. galbanus*, Moustached Laughingthrush *G. cineraceus*, Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer*, Green Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus*, Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis* and Upland Pipit *Anthus sylvanus*. Asterisked (\*) species in the above lists have previously been listed for Laos in otherwise authoritative sources, but at some time during the past 30 years these records have been discredited (see further details in Duckworth *et al.* 1999: 157-159). Additionally, Baer's Pochard has recently been seen in Laos, although not yet formally published (J. W. K. Parr verbally 2000).

About 700 species of birds are known from Laos, so these 87 would represent an almost 12.5% (one-eighth) increase. This by no means insignificant discrepancy may have arisen in several ways:

1. The authors know of records that I do not, and the maps are a faithful representation of records.
2. The authors' maps are not intended to represent what is known, but what they fancy each species's distribution ought to be; the introduction (p. 1) is ambiguous on this matter.
3. The maps were compiled without due care and attention to detail.

Were the first or second options correct, the maps should incorporate accurately the existing published information. However, many species long known in those parts of Laos included in MacKinnon's base-map are not mapped as occurring, including such common ones as Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting*, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithacus*, Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Manchurian Bush Warbler *Cettia canturians* and Two-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*. Furthermore, for many species the mapped Lao distribution defies any rational interpretation of past records or ecological extrapolation: one sees higher montane species centred on the Mekong valley (e.g. Yellow-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe cinerea*), specialists of wide slow-flowing rivers marked as resident across much or all of the Annamite mountains and the northern highlands (e.g. River Tern *Sterna aurantia* and Little Tern *S. albifrons*), non-breeding migrants shown as widespread residents (e.g. Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* and Blyth's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides*), major misrepresentations for restricted-range and/or

globally threatened or near threatened species (the very ones where distributional information is most accessible, e.g. Red-collared Woodpecker *Picus rabieri*, White-winged Magpie *Urocissa whiteheadi* and Short-tailed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis davidianus*) and a host of others which are just plain wrong (Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha* is particularly misleading; this montane species is known from a handful of sites, all above 1600 m, and most unlikely to occur below this level, is mapped for the whole of Laos portrayed). Many more examples could be listed.

These sort of errors are of great concern. Many of the species mapped erroneously for Laos may be found there in the future. Some will be locally common and perhaps even have globally important populations in Laos. Yet an itinerant birder crossing the Chinese border into far northern Laos and finding a population of the globally threatened Ward's Trogon on a hitherto unvisited mountain might not bother to report it and is certainly unlikely to exert her/himself documenting Mallard sightings, as (*fide* this book) the species are already well known from this part of Laos. Species known to occur in Laos but not mapped as so by MacKinnon will generate less confusion, as there is already adequately accessible public information documenting their true status. It is for this reason that I list above all species erroneously mapped for Laos, but only a selection of those erroneously omitted. cursory examination of mapped distributions for Korea, Vietnam and Thailand suggests that they also contain numerous errors. Since the book's foreword (p. 1) is explicit that the maps cover countries neighbouring China, these countries presumably received the same attention to detail as did China.

In a review of another recently published field guide,<sup>3</sup> I specifically applauded the author for not succumbing to the modern temptation to use flashy maps to show species distribution. This book on China comes at a coincidentally providential time for indicating just the sort of problems I am concerned about. The errors listed above would never have happened if distribution had been presented textually by sub-region in the style exemplified by King *et al.*<sup>4</sup> and Robson.<sup>5</sup> More authors should consider using this system. If they persist in wishing to use maps, then for little-known regions the use of dot distribution maps showing valid records is the only responsible system. The time taken to compile and check such maps is probably beyond the resources of commercially driven field guides.

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## Lesser Spotted Eagle in China

The record of Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* in *OBC Bull.* 31: 49 as new for China is in error as it was not in the field. Instead it refers to a mounted skin specimen encountered in the collection of the Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography Research in Urumqi while conducting a survey of ground-jays *Podoces* and other species throughout Xinjiang. Unfortunately I do not have information about the place and date of capture. Direct comparison with a mounted specimen of Greater Spotted Eagle *A. clanga* was possible and due to its size and colour the bird was thought to be a Lesser Spotted Eagle of the subspecies *A. p. hastata*.

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## Berbak National Park, Jambi Province, Sumatra, Indonesia

Birdwatchers visiting Jambi province in central Sumatra mostly head for Kerinci-Seblat National Park. There the mountains rising to 3800 m harbour many of Sumatra's endemic species on their rainforest clad slopes. This site was described in *OBC Bulletin* 21.

Lesser known and ornithologically complementing this ecosystem is Berbak National Park located on the coastal lowlands in the east of Jambi Province. This park provides habitat for swamp-forest, riverine and coastal species. The Dutch government established a Game Reserve

here in 1935 and it was formally gazetted as a National Park by the Indonesian Government in 1995.

Most of the park is an alluvial coastal plain less than 10 m above sea level, much of which is inundated during the wet season (October-March). A network of rivers and tributaries intersects over 190,000 ha of both peat swamp-forest with peat up to 10 m deep and freshwater swamp-forest. At least 245 species of birds have been identified in the park. Species of note include Great Argus *Argusianus argus*, White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, nine hornbills including Great *Buceros bicornis* and Helmeted *B. vigil*, 11 Kingfishers including Oriental Dwarf *Ceyx erithacus rufidorsa* and Ruddy *Halycon coronanda*, Silvery Pigeon *Columba argentina*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Black Baza *Aviceda eulophotes*, Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea*, Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi*, Lesser Adjutant *Leptotilos javanicus*, Great Iora *Aegithina lafresnayei* and Buettikofer's Babbler *Pellorneum buettikoferi*.

A permit to visit the park must be obtained from Kantor Unit Taman Nasional Berbak, Jl. Prof. Dr. Sri Sudewi, Jambi 60251. Arrangements to stay in the park at homestays may also be made there, and an official guide can be arranged. Guides are mandatory but you may be able to arrange for him to join you at Suak Kandis or Nipah Panjang. Take rations for you and your guide. From Jambi there are two routes to the park. Boats leave below the Angso Duo market daily for Rp. 11,000 per head or you can catch an opulet (minibus) to Suak Kandis for Rp. 3,000, from where a boat to Nipah Panjang will cost about Rp. 8,000. The latter is a quicker route, taking four hours. At Nipah Panjang a good contact is Pak Suhaimi, Special Police, Forest Protection, PHPA, who can best arrange your visit and act as official guide. If you wish to avoid Nipah Pajang, which is not renowned for its accommodation, make enquiries at Suak Kandis at the Park Information Post on how to charter a boat. This will cost around 200,000 per day for a speedboat and rather less for a diesel fishing boat.

Two areas in particular are worth visiting; the first, named Air Hitam Dalam, is accessible year round but can be uncomfortable in the wet season. From the homestay bungalow there are trails into the forest including a three day trek to Suak Kandis but birdwatching is better by boat along the river. The second productive area is called Air Hitam Laut. To get here, however, entails a five to eight hour journey from Nipah Panjang, via

the South China Sea. This is not recommended between October and March when the monsoon blows and the waves are high. From the homestay at Simpang Gaya it is possible to see Malay Tapir and Sumatran Tiger. Twenty-three species of wader winter on the mudflats at Sungai Cemara (outside the park) and are reported present from November to March. There are large numbers of Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Bar-tailed Godwit *L. lapponica*, Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Terek Sandpiper *Xerus cinereus*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Great Knot *C. tenuirostris*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squaterola* and Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*. Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* has also been recorded here.

Richard Gregory-Smith

### Thattakad Bird Sanctuary, India

After a chance meeting with two local Indian birdwatchers near Thattakad Bird sanctuary in early December 1999 I decided to spend a couple of nights looking for a handful of hard-to-find species which I had not seen on the usual southern Indian circuit. I was taken on a thirty-six hour tour by the two men, named Eldhose and Jifo, which included one night inside the sanctuary and one outside. The area has many southern Indian specialities and seemed far superior to any of the other sites I had visited a week or two previously. I would suggest birdwatchers include this site on a tour, if only for the owls.

The most notable species were:

**Mottled Wood Owl** *Strix ocellata*; a pair photographed and seen easily during the day. I was told there were three pairs in the same area and that it was a fairly common species outside the sanctuary.

**Spot-bellied Eagle Owl** *Bubo nipalensis*; one bird seen several times, calling throughout the night inside the sanctuary. According to Eldhose and Jifo, although this owl is often heard it is more difficult to see. I saw one or possibly two individuals in six or seven hours.

**Malayan Night Heron** *Gorsachius melanolpohus*; unfortunately only an immature in the sanctuary rehabilitation 'Zoo'. This bird had been found in a nest in a felled tree, proving the species breeds within the sanctuary.

**Sri Lanka Frogmouth** *Batrachostomus moniliger*; very common both inside and outside the sanctuary; 10+ were heard in three hours one evening. On two occasions I just chanced on birds perched by paths and on another occasion I was able to observe one male and two females from the same spot.

**Rusty-tailed Flycatcher** *Muscicapa ruficauda*; three birds seen in a day. This was the only site where I observed this species in the south.

**Grey-headed Bulbul** *Pycnonotus priocephalus*; common both in and outside the sanctuary.

**Nilgiri Wood Pigeon** *Columba elphinstonii*; only a single bird recorded but I was informed that the species is relatively common in the sanctuary.

Eldhose and Jifo are keen for birdwatchers to visit the site and they make both friendly and informative guides.

Bill Simpson, c/o Green Watch, Central Fire Station, Shakespeare Street, Nottingham NG1 4FB

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Captions for plate on pages 54 and 55

Gunung Ambang Nature Reserve, north Sulawesi, Indonesia: see p. 56 (All photos by Jon Riley)

- 1 Scaly Kingfisher *Actenoides princeps*
- 2 Dark-eared Myza *Myza celebensis*
- 3 Cinnabar Hawk Owl *Ninox ios*
- 4 Cinnabar Hawk Owl *Ninox ios*

Berbak National Park, Jambi Province Sumatra, Indonesia (All photos by Richard Gregory-Smith)

- 5 Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda*
- 6 Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithacus rufidorsa*
- 7 Lesser Adjutant *Leptotilos javanicus*

Thattakad Bird Sanctuary, India (All photos by Bill Simpson)

- 8 Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*
- 9 Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*
- 10 Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*
- 11 Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*



2

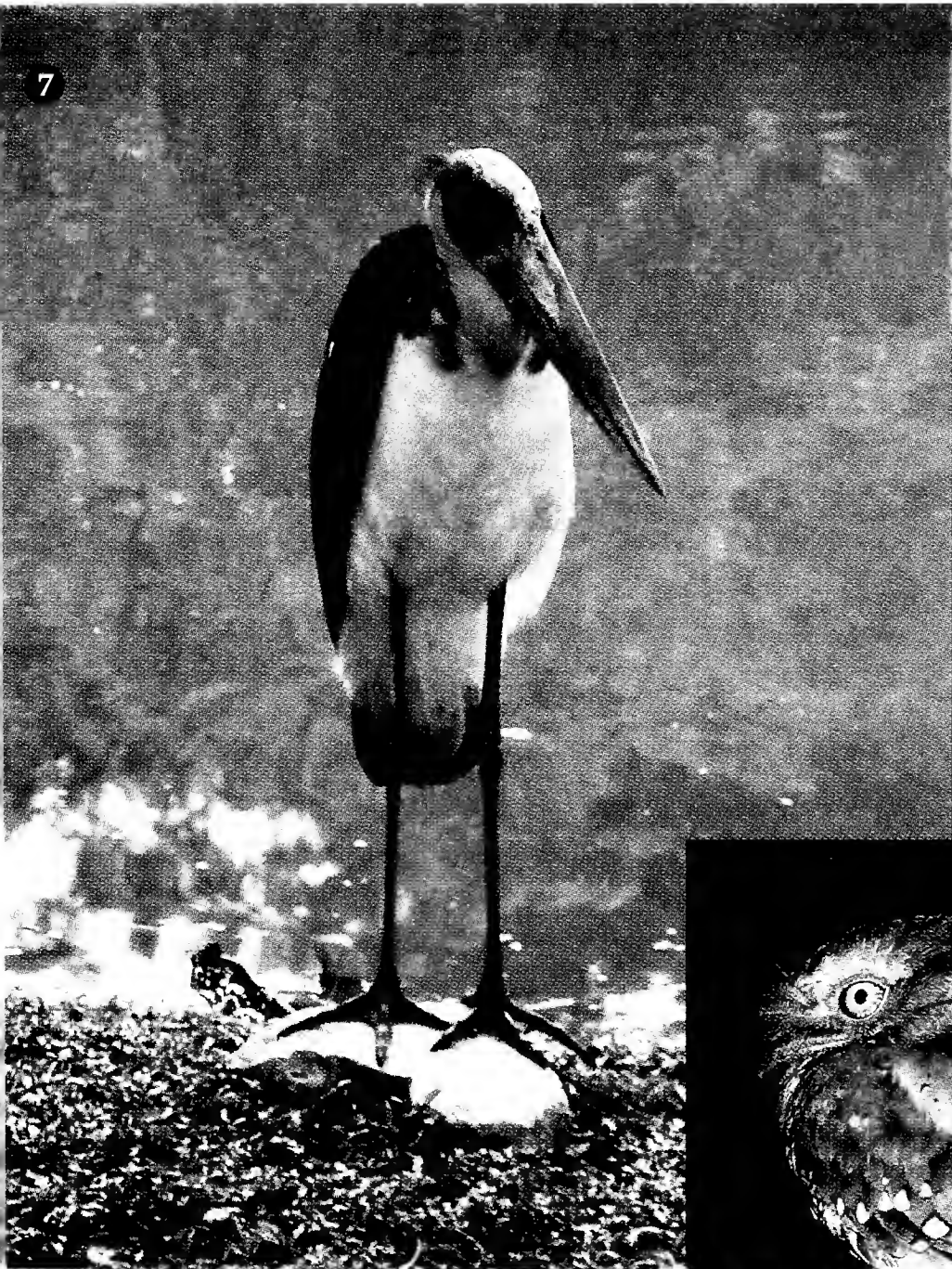


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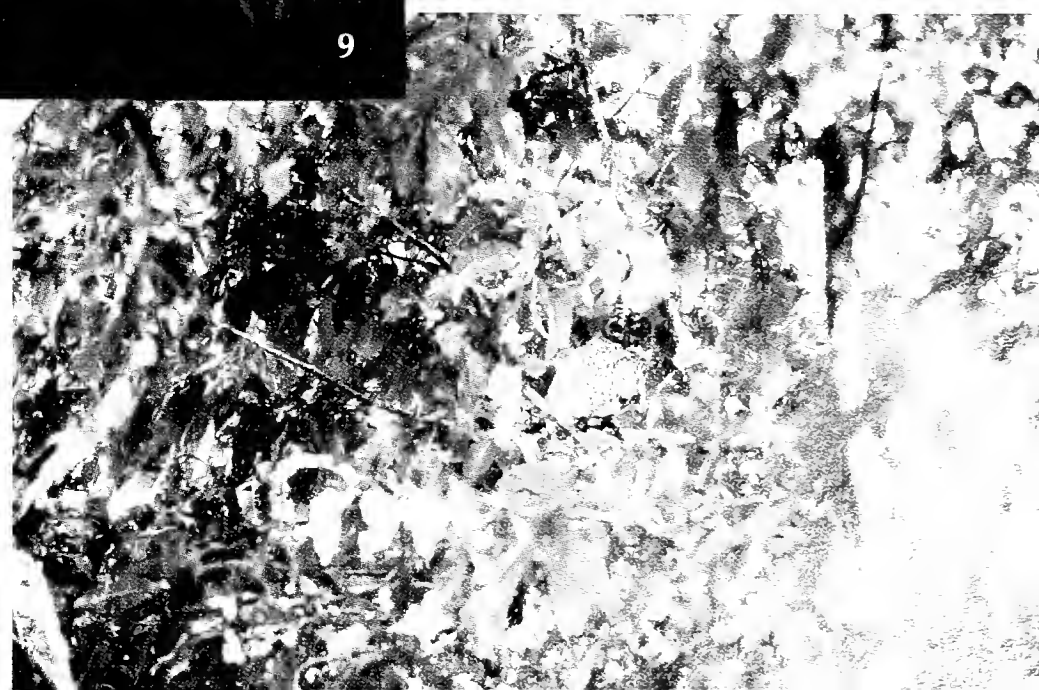
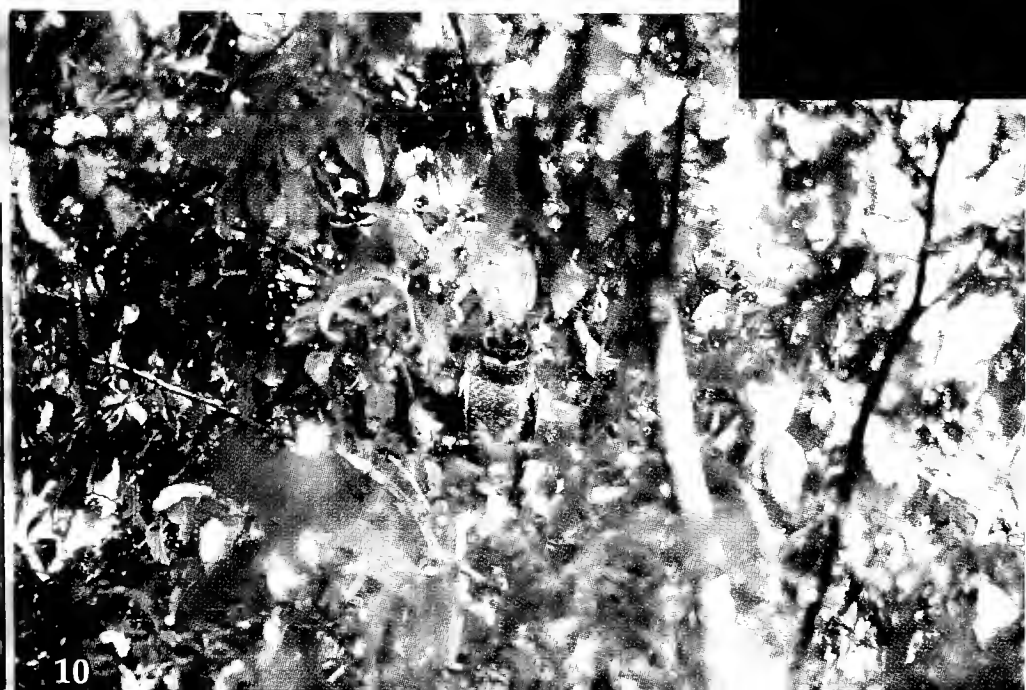


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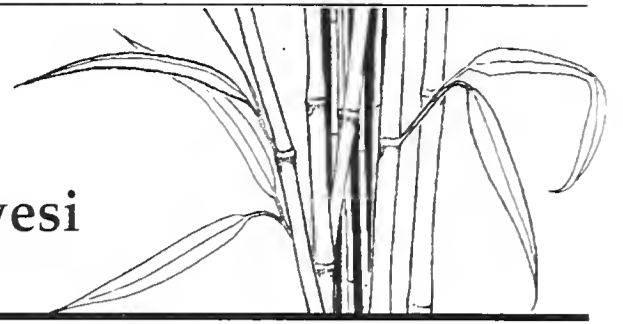


*(Captions are on page 53)*



# Birdwatching Areas

## Gunung Ambang Nature Reserve, North Sulawesi



The Indonesian island of Sulawesi, lying at the heart of Wallacea, is famous for its unique array of species: at least 88 bird species are found nowhere else in the world. The majority of these endemics are restricted to the island's montane areas and have become familiar to birdwatchers visiting the impressive Lore Lindu National Park in central Sulawesi.<sup>1-3</sup> However, away from Lore Lindu, many mountain ranges remain little explored.

A chain of mountains runs along almost the entire length of the northern peninsula of Sulawesi. In the west this forms the Tentolo-Matinan range and reaches heights of over 2,000 m, whilst to the east the huge Bogani Nani Wartabone (Dumoga Bone) National Park includes extensive areas of montane forest. The only recent surveys of these mountains revealed a diverse avifauna with many exciting endemics.<sup>4</sup>

To the east of the national park lies the small — 8,000 ha — Cagar Alam (Nature Reserve) Gunung Ambang. Like many reserves throughout Indonesia, Ambang has not been surveyed in detail and the biological diversity it supports has yet to be adequately documented. In November 1999 I led a team of scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society — Indonesia Program in Sulawesi on the first in-depth surveys to be conducted at the reserve. These led to the discovery of two of Sulawesi's threatened endemics — Matinan Flycatcher *Cyornis sanfordi* and the recently described Cinnabar Hawk Owl *Ninox ios*.<sup>5</sup> We also found that the reserve was an excellent birding site, easy to reach from the provincial town of Kotamobagu, and a visit to Ambang could be combined with a stay at the Toraut research station at Dumoga Bone, already a popular location with birders. Below I provide details of access, accommodation, and the more interesting species.

### Access and accommodation

The reserve is under the administration of the National Park office in Kotamobagu and birders must obtain permits from here; the office is out of town in Mongkonai (get a mikrolet — blue minibus) on Jalan AKD, telephone 0434-22548.

Kotamobagu is served by buses from Manado (where there is an airport with international and domestic flights) and Gorontalo (for people arriving from Palu/Lore Lindu).

Birders visiting Ambang will have to be accompanied by a ranger — not only is this advisable given the area's remoteness, but rangers can also assist with language and organising food/accommodation close to the site. Daily rates are usually between US\$3 and US\$5. These rangers are used to the demands of birders — such as early starts — and know their birds; check at the park office.

Access to the best birding areas is from the village of Singsingon, located at a chilly 1000 m. The village can be reached by a crowded public bus — one hour — from the centre of Kotamobagu or alternatively one can charter a bus direct to the village for a more comfortable ride; expect to pay about US\$5. Ask the park office for help.

There is no official accommodation in Singsingon but visiting birders can stay in the nature reserve guard post at the edge of the village. The post has running water and electricity,

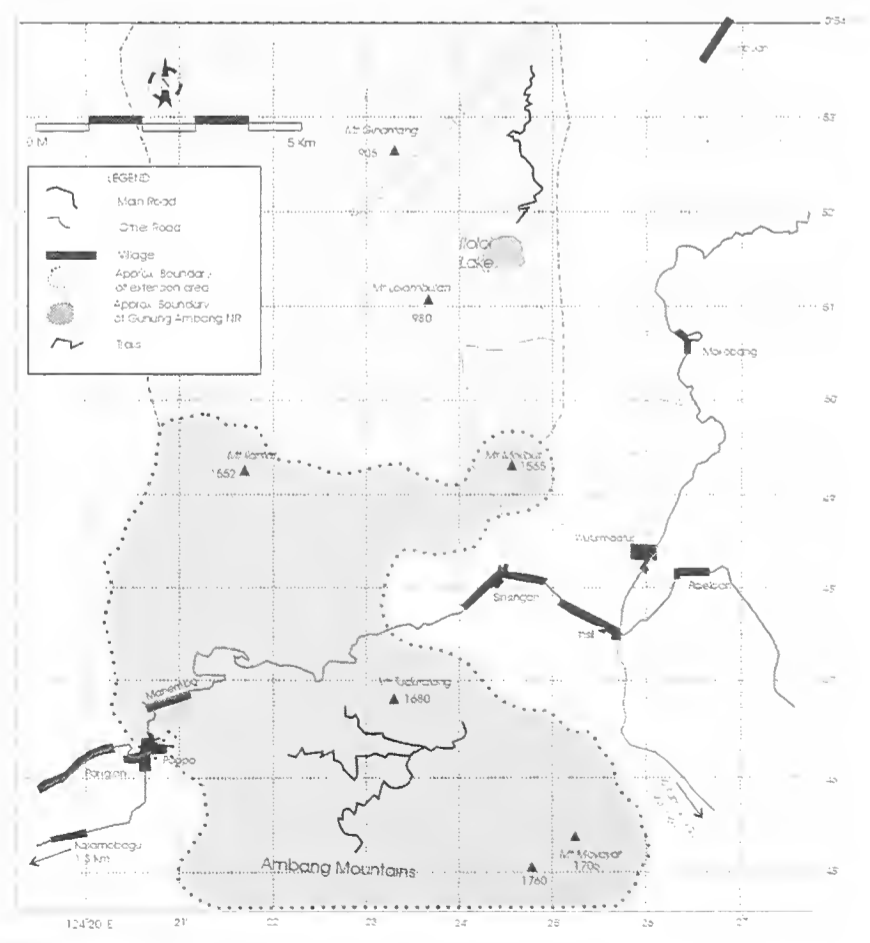


Fig 1. Gunung Ambang Nature Reserve

but no beds (at November 1999) and visitors need to bring camping mats or similar. Accommodation can also be sought in Singsingon village with a local family – contact Yulius Domingus (Yus) the local park guard. There are some food stalls operating at night, but for US\$2 or US\$3 per person per day Yus can arrange for food to be prepared for you. This will be simple — rice and fish — so it's a good idea to shop in Kotamobagu.

The footpath to the reserve winds gently uphill from close to the Singsingon guard post, passing first through agricultural land and scrub, then selectively logged forest before reaching relatively undisturbed forest after some four km. Ambang is an easy site to visit: there are no steep hills and the paths through the forest are well-marked.

## Birds

Undoubtedly the main attraction of a visit to Ambang is the chance to see Cinnabar Hawk Owl. This species was recently described from a specimen collected in Dumoga Bone in 1985<sup>4,5</sup> and the WCS team mist-netted a single bird in November 1999. The owl may be endemic to north Sulawesi as it has not been recorded at the relatively well-watched Lore Lindu National Park. It was caught in forest at 1400 m at Rawa Paya, otherwise information is scarce, partly because the calls of the species are not known. Searches for the owl should be focused around the Rawa Paya area, along the main footpath through the reserve. The WCS team also recorded Speckled Hawk Owl *Ninox punctulata* in this area so care should be taken in distinguishing these two species.

Other night birds were recorded in scrub and cultivated areas. Early morning departures for the forest usually produce Sulawesi Owl *Tyto rosenbergii* and Great Eared Nightjar *Eurostopodus macrotis* around Singsingon, whilst Sulawesi Scops Owl *Otus manadensis* is found in scrub and along the forest edge.

The second speciality of Ambang is the little-known Matinan Flycatcher, a species endemic to montane forest in north Sulawesi. The species is elusive but occurs in both logged and primary forest, and in November 1999 a nest site was found on the edge of the main footpath close to the forest/scrub boundary. Flycatchers were noted in mixed-species flocks, generally in the forest mid-storey, and are confusingly similar to both the common Sulphur-bellied Whistler *Pachycephala sulfuriventer* and Sulawesi Babbler

*Trichastoma celebense*. A useful distinction is the flycatchers' habit of perching motionless for periods before snatching for food items.

Other flycatcher species at Ambang are easier to find. They include the noisy, inquisitive Citrine Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa helianthea* which is common throughout the reserve, Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra* and Little Pied Flycatcher *F. westermanni*, both represented by endemic races and common in the forest understorey, whilst Island Flycatcher *Eumyias panayensis* is most often seen in tree canopies in more open areas.

Citrine Canary Flycatcher also joins mixed flocks associating with Streaky-headed White-eye *Lophozosterops squamiceps*, Crimson-crowned Flowerpecker *Dicaeum uehrkorni*, Cerulean Cuckooshrike *Coracina teuminckii*, and Sulawesi Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus sarasinorum*. All these species are endemic and the passage of a flock can surround one with birds for up to an hour and leave one confused with identification problems for the next.

Two elusive species occasionally seen on the edges of flocks are Scarlet Myzomela *Myzomela dibapha* — represented by a distinctive endemic race — and Dark-eared Myza *Myza celebensis*. The latter is the commoner species at Ambang and moves quickly from one inflorescence to the next in frantic pursuit of nectar. The genus *Myza* is endemic to Sulawesi, but this is not the only peculiarity to be seen at Ambang. Three other species in the reserve also belong to ancient lineages that have evolved in the unique environment of Sulawesi's forests producing endemic genera. Foremost amongst these — and difficult to overlook given its extraordinary trumpeted calls — is Malia *Malia grata*, represented by an endemic subspecies very different to birds in central Sulawesi. Groups of Malia announce their presence long before becoming visible and their manic calls and energetic actions attract many other species, including Sulawesi Drongo *Dicrurus montanus*, Yellow-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus calyorhynchus*, and Rusty-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura teysmanni*. The other two species belonging to endemic genera are more restrained and consequently easy to miss; Purple-bearded Bee-eater *Meropogon forsteni* is a quiet inhabitant of open areas and the forest edge, whilst Olive-flanked Whistler *Hylocitrea boneensis* is a very rare species at higher altitudes in the reserve.

One can come across forest floor and understorey specialists throughout the reserve.

The most repetitive song must surely belong to Mountain Tailorbird *Orthotomus cuculatus* which is a low-level skulker, whilst the peculiar Chestnut-backed Bush Warbler *Bradypterus castaneus* behaves more like a mouse than a bird, running around on the forest floor with its tail cocked — Rawa Paya is a good area to see these species. Another target species for many birders is Scaly Kingfisher *Actenoides princeps*, endemic to montane forest throughout Sulawesi and particularly easy to see at Ambang in the less disturbed areas of forest.

Montane areas of Sulawesi support a less diverse frugivorous community in comparison to the lowlands, and Ambang is no exception. Hornbills are very rare, and pigeons are represented by Red-eared Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus fischeri*, a high altitude specialist, White-bellied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula forsteni*, and Brown Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia amboinensis*. Parrots are common, with the noisy, ringing calls of Golden-mantled Racquet-tail *Prioniturus platurus* heard in all areas; the two endemic lorikeets, Ornate *Trichoglossus ornatus* and Yellow-and-green *T. flavoviridis*, are also common, but most easily seen in fast-moving flocks along the forest edge.

The forest edge and adjacent agricultural land is the best area to search for raptors and the walk back to Singsingon usually produces two or three species. WCS recorded Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*, Barred Honey-buzzard *Pernis celebensis*, and the migrant Grey-faced Buzzard *Butastur indicus* among eight species of raptor at Ambang.

## Mammals

In addition to a wealth of montane bird endemics, several mammal species can be seen at Ambang, despite populations in the reserve suffering from high hunting pressure. Visitors are most likely to see Crested Black Macaque *Macaca nigra*, although monkeys are very wary at Ambang because of hunting and, consequently, are found in more remote areas of the reserve. The nocturnal Spectral Tarsier *Tarsius spectrum* is frequently seen at the forest edge in the early mornings, but other species, including Sulawesi Pig *Sus celebensis*, Anoa *Bubalus depressicornis/B. quarelsi*, Bear Cuscus *Ailurops ursinus* and Sulawesi Dwarf Cuscus *Stigocuscus celebensis*, are rare and visitors will need luck to see any of these species. Spotlighting for owls can produce lots of forest rats – all indigenous species are endemic to the

island — but these represent a real identification challenge!

## Notes

Hunting is rife at Ambang and care should be taken to avoid the numerous traps set throughout the forest. The majority are set to catch small mammals and should cause nothing but an inconvenience, but if you do come across any traps ask the rangers to destroy them.

Wildlife Conservation Society – Indonesia Program in Sulawesi is undertaking the first large-scale inventory of all Sulawesi's protected areas. Any birdwatchers visiting the island should feel free to contact the author for advice and assistance. Similarly I would be most interested to receive any observation notes and records from Gunung Ambang and elsewhere on Sulawesi.

On behalf of WCS-IP, Sulawesi, I would like to thank Natural Resource Management (NRM/EPIQ), a program supported by USAID, for their funding of our fieldwork.

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# Large-scale swallow trapping in Xiangkhouang Province, North Laos

Bird densities over much of Laos are strikingly low, in many cases this is attributable to heavy hunting pressure, mostly for food. A recent review of the status of wildlife in Laos mentions many different hunting practices, each targeting different quarry species.<sup>1</sup> One of the most dramatic practices mentioned by the review, that of trapping migrating swallows, has only recently come to the attention of modern conservationists. The following note describes the trapping in more detail, with the hope that other visiting birdwatchers will help to monitor it.

In mid-February 1999 we made a weekend birdwatching trip to Xiangkhouang Province in the mountainous north-east of Laos. We had come across a report of large-scale bird trapping there<sup>2</sup> and decided that it was worth investigating. As an added attraction there had once been a rich community of grassland birds in the long-deforested uplands there.<sup>3</sup> The many interesting bird records, including species from the remnants of the grassland bird community, will be described elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In the rest of this article we focus on the trapping practices we observed.

The flight from Vientiane to Xiangkhouang crosses a wide tract of mountainous land dominated by forest and shifting cultivation. During the last 15 minutes this gives way to a wide, rolling, grassy plateau dotted with villages and a few stands of pine trees. There are many bomb-craters, reminders of the Indochinese war of the 1960s and 70s when the Xiangkhouang (or Tranninh) plateau suffered an astonishing level of aerial bombardment.<sup>5</sup> Amongst these we saw dozens of intriguing, geometrically shaped patches of bare earth whose origin was less obvious from the air.

We hadn't gone far out of Xiangkhouang before we started seeing more of the bare areas visible from the plane and soon we passed some close to the road. Our taxi-driver confirmed our suspicion that these were the sites of bird traps. He also told us that they weren't in use at that time of year and we should come back when swallows were migrating through the area in August or, ideally, September–October if we wanted to see them in operation. In February all we could see were neat areas of bare, cleared ground, 2–3 m wide and 6 m long, rectangular with a triangular point at one end, giving a bottle shape. As we drove on we were amazed by their abundance. Many were on ridge-crests or gently sloping hillsides (see plate), others were at the edges of pools and streams. In the Ban Latsen

marshes these bare trapping areas were specially-made raised platforms of earth. In these marshes each small pool was completely ringed by trap sites at 10–20 m intervals all along the shore (see plate). Having seen this, we resolved to come back at the peak trapping season and get the rest of the story.

Various constraints meant we had to make our next visit in the last week of August and, as we had feared, we were told that the peak trapping period had yet to begin. Nonetheless many traps were actively manned and we easily found people willing to discuss their methods and let us watch the traps in action. It is a remarkably simple and effective technique that relies on live decoys. A few live swallows are tethered in the middle of the bare area whilst the trapper hides at the pointed end, either in a small hut or behind a blind. When other swallows are attracted to come down to the ground the two halves of a large rectangular clap net are flipped shut using long strings, pinning the bird to the ground. The trapper runs out, puts the captive in a holding basket, reopens the net and returns to his hide. The trapper we interviewed in most detail kept small upturned baskets over his decoys where they were tethered, to protect them from the sun. Only when another swallow flew past did he take the sun-hats off and take his place in the hide. We stayed outside the hut and watched in astonishment as the bird immediately landed next to the decoy, drawn down as if by a magnet, apparently oblivious to us standing in full view only 4 m away. The whole catching process took less than 5 minutes.

Clap-netting is supplemented by a lesser amount of liming. Some huts have a branched bamboo pole 8–10 m tall sticking out of the roof, again with live decoys attached. Free birds coming to rest are caught by brushing them with a glued pole cautiously raised up through the roof of the hut.

Talking informally with the trappers we learnt that they usually catch quite small numbers of swallows each day but that on a few days during September or early October misty weather conditions would coincide with heavy migration and huge numbers could be caught in a short space of time. Three informants independently stated that more than a hundred, perhaps more than two hundred, could reasonably be expected on such a day. This suggests that the total catch at a typical trap site over a season ought to be hundreds of birds. We made two revisits in the hope of seeing higher levels of trapping but on 8-12 October 1999 both swallow numbers and trapping effort were quite modest and by 26-30 November 1999 very few swallows remained and the season was obviously long over as most of the trap sites were unmanned and in disrepair. The same was true when we visited in April 2000.

Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* (locally called nok airn) are clearly the predominant species caught, but trappers also described three other types caught in smaller numbers. One was a larger type with a reddish rump which seems likely to include both Striated Swallow *Hirundo striolata* and Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*, in support of this one Striated Swallow was seen for sale in a market on this visit. Two other small species were reported as being greyish with feathered feet (locally called nok tin hun) and grey and white all over (nok keetao). It seems likely that Martin *Delichon* and *Riparia* species occur in the area on passage but it is not possible to suggest which are caught from these descriptions.

Captured birds are caught solely for their meat and it seems likely that many, perhaps most, are eaten locally, since they will not keep. Many are plucked and eaten by the trapper's family or sold in markets on the day of capture. In Phonsavan central market in August we saw two sizes of plucked bird for sale. The smaller ones, presumably Barn Swallows, were selling for 1000 kip each (at the time, 8000 kip = \$1 approximately), and the larger ones, probably Striated Swallows, were 1500 kip each. There is a second mode of preparation which involves plucking the birds and then leaving them to ferment for two days in shallow water with a little rice and salt. This results in a dish, known locally as nok dtoung, highly unappetising to the western eye. The small species cost less when prepared like this (1000 kip for three), so traders probably only ferment the surplus of each day's

catch, allowing it to be sold on later days. The stall holders told us that after five days even Lao people consider the dish inedible.

It is fascinating to imagine how full of swallows the markets must be on peak trapping days, especially if these peaks occur simultaneously over a wide area of the plateau. At such times it is hard to believe all the swallows could be consumed locally within the five day limit, and there must be some incentive to export the nok dtoung to other areas, but we gathered no evidence that this takes place. The dish is analogous to the national staple condiment made from fermented fish meat, called pa daek. This remains edible for much longer than five days and it may be that there is a further method of preparing swallows that we were not told about which allows longer term storage.

It is also notable that the swallow trade through Phonsavan market did not appear to be included in the recent clampdown on wildlife trade there. As will be described in detail elsewhere, up until at least April a great variety of wildlife was openly traded in the market. On our August revisit we found considerably less (with the notable exception of the swallows) and were told by stall holders this was because the police had increased their enforcement of the national prohibition on wildlife trading.

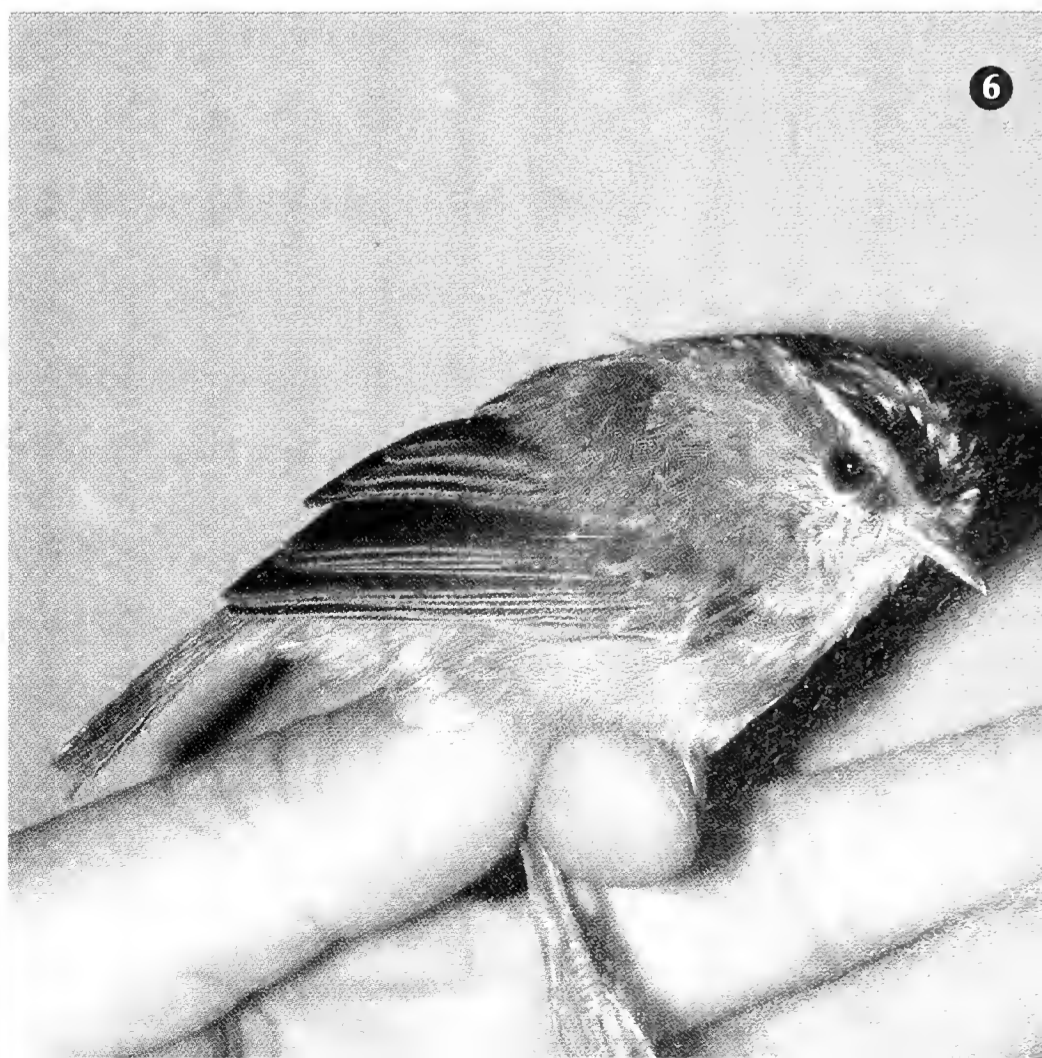
Finally, we have to ask whether this is a significant conservation issue. Although we did not make a full count, the numbers of traps we saw and the total area of similar terrain on the plateau suggests to us that there could easily be 1000 active trapping sites, probably many more. If these catch a conservative average of 100 birds each per year the catch would total 100 000 and the true figure might be several times higher. We gained no indication of the trend in trapping effort, but the trappers we spoke to stated that the numbers of birds passing through had not declined noticeably. Here we should note that the French administrator Armand David-Beaulieu wrote a detailed account of the avifauna of this area based on his time there from about 1937 to 1942 and described quite clearly both the clap-netting and liming techniques.<sup>3</sup> He reported Barn Swallows being caught in important numbers and stated that the annual destruction was considerable. He also noted that Striated Swallows and/or Red-rumped Swallows were destroyed in great quantities. The fact that heavy trapping was occurring 60 years ago hints that the harvest might be sustainable, although of



- 1 Hillside traps (Photo: Tom Evans)
- 2 Lakeside traps (Photo: Tom Evans)
- 3 Trapped Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (Photo: Tom Evans)
- 4 Lakeside traps (Photo: Tom Evans)

From the Field (p. 67)

- 5 Bianchi's Warbler *Seicercus valentini* (Photo: Yu Yat Tung)
- 6 Yellow-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe cinerea* (Photo: Yu Yat Tung)



course these vague statements could conceal large recent increases in trapping effort and/or declines in population. Furthermore, trapping was presumably much less intensive during the hostilities of the 1960s and 1970s.

Swallow trapping is certainly rare or absent in most of south and central Laos but north-east Laos has been poorly covered by recent wildlife surveys so it may be that trapping also occurs outside the Xiangkhouang Plateau. Friends say they have seen some trap sites in Houaphan Province but we could see none on the flights into two other northern towns, Bokeo and Louangphabang. A similar method is used on a much smaller scale to catch swallows on Mekong sandbars near Vientiane, both for food and to provide birds to release at temples as a merit-making act during the autumn Buddhist festivals. Nonetheless we believe only wide, open, relatively flat areas would attract large numbers of swallows to come down to the ground and in north Laos such areas are scarce, so the bulk of the trapping seems likely to be concentrated on the Xiangkhouang Plateau.

In the context of such widespread, abundant species with few other known threats in Laos it seems unreasonable to propose diverting conservation resources to them from other higher priority species such as large mammals, large waterbirds, crocodiles and turtles. Perhaps the only appropriate activity at the moment is for interested observers to keep visiting the area during the trapping season and try to learn more about the scale, detail and recent trends of the harvest. In this vein we would like to offer one parting thought - the conservation significance

of the harvest would change dramatically if the huge autumn hirundine passage was found to include that most enigmatic of South-East Asian birds, the critically endangered White-eyed River Martin *Pseudochelidon sirintarae*.<sup>6</sup>

## Acknowledgements

We thank Gordon Claridge, Martin Duckworth, John Foster, Sharon London, Paul Newton, Hanneke Nooren, John Parr, Bryan Stuart and Rob Timmins for their company and for sharing their observations.

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## More news on the new monal discovered from Arunachal Pradesh

A new pheasant taxon belonging to the genus *Lophophorus* was discovered in late 1998 during survey work on pheasant distributions in western Arunachal Pradesh. In order to collect more information on this new monal another six-month survey was undertaken from October 1999 to January 2000. The following is an account of the latest findings on this new monal.

Based on evidence obtained during the earlier surveys it was found that the new monal had a limited distribution range occurring only along the Great Himalayan Range from the eastern part of Tawang district to somewhere along the western part of Upper Subansiri district. Therefore, our major task during the current survey was to identify the exact distribution limits of the new monal, and also see whether it overlapped in distribution with Sclater's Monal [throughout] *Lophophorus sclateri* to which it resembles the closest, and with the other congeneric species Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*.

Two new districts along the central part of Arunachal Pradesh were visited during the survey that included Upper Subansiri and West Siang. These two districts along with the Lower Subansiri district that we had visited earlier were the main focus of this survey. There we visited a few sites located in the interior close to the Indo-Chinese border. We conducted interviews with local people regarding the monals, and also trekked to a few areas in search of them. We suspected the Subansiri River flowing through the Upper Subansiri District to be a geographical barrier separating the new monal from Sclater's Monal. Thus, west of the river we expected to find the new monal and on the east Sclater's Monal. We also suspected the new monal to be a geographical variant of Sclater's Monal since it resembles the latter in overall plumage coloration except for the white coloration of the tail. If true above was true then we expected to find other tail colour patterns along the zone of contact or overlap, which was likely to be in the Upper Subansiri or West Siang district.

Information obtained during the current survey however indicated that the above suspicions were not quite correct. Local people in most parts of the Upper Subansiri and West Siang districts recognised only Sclater's Monal, which is known to them as "Pede". In the Upper Subansiri district locals also knew about the

occurrence of this monal west of the river Subansiri. To support this, evidence in the form of male tail feathers of the new monal were also seen with a local. Only in and around Taksing locality, a border post along the Indo-Chinese border in this district, did local people know of the occurrence of both Sclater's Monal and the new monal. The latter is known to them as "Daedong". This rules out the possibility of the Subansiri River acting as a geographical barrier.

The other interesting findings of the survey were the discovery of two different tail color patterns of the new monal. At Redding village, close to Taksing in the Upper Subansiri district a set of male rectrices collected was completely white with dark bases like that of the new monal. However, of the fifteen tail feathers seen, eight of them have a small chestnut patch at the center (see Plate 2). The locals did not have any specific name for this monal. At first glance these "Taksing monal" tail feathers appeared to belong to a hybrid between the new monal and Sclater's Monal since according to the locals the latter two occur together there. However, it is also not known whether these tail feathers belonged to an immature or to a geographical variant of Sclater's Monal. On another occasion, we examined the rectrices of a male new monal collected from the Polosung locality near Sarli in Lower Subansiri district. Four of the sixteen tail feathers of this "Polosung monal" had on their outer edges and just above the dark base, a slight chestnut splash (see Plate 1). This was the first such pattern observed in the nine complete sets of the new monal rectrices seen so far, apart from the five male sightings there. The locality from where the Polosung monal was collected is also well away from the known distribution of Sclater's Monal.

There is no clear explanation for the two new tail colour patterns observed during the survey as represented by the Taksing monal and Polosung monal. These could be individual variations within the new monal, as they do not show any consistent geographical trend or



(Captions are on page 65)



The survey team

indications of intergradation towards Sclater's Monal.

On plotting the presence/absence data of the monals on a map of Arunachal Pradesh it was found that a mountain range which is a part of the Great Himalayan Range forming the district boundary between the Lower Subansiri and Upper Subansiri districts probably acts as a barrier. However, this range called the "Subansiri Divide" may not be an effective barrier since there are not many high peaks, although Sclater's Monal appears to be present only east of this range. On the other hand the new monal does not seem to occur east of the river Subansiri. Farther east in the West Siang district local people did not recognise the new monal at all. Along the western end of the distribution range of the new monal the "Sela Range", which forms the district boundary between Tawang and West Kameng districts, appears to be the distributional limit. It was also found that the new monal overlaps in distribution with the Himalayan Monal there.

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Captions for plate on page 64

- 1 "Polosung" Monal tail feathers (Photo: Suresh Kumar)
- 2 "Taksing" Monal tail feathers (Photo: Suresh Kumar)
- 3 Monal tail feathers (Photo: Suresh Kumar)

Photospot; first photographs from the field of this Sri Lankan endemic.

- 4 Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhucephalus* (Photo: Steve Chalmers)
- 5 Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhucephalus* (Photo: Steve Chalmers)

During the survey we also collected three skins of the new monal (a male, a female and a subadult) kept with the locals in Sarli locality of Lower Subansiri district. On examination of these skins with the Sclater's Monal skins at the Bombay Natural History Museum, and from published descriptions, paintings and information obtained during the survey it leads to the conclusion that the new monal represents an unknown western population of Sclater's Monal.

Currently, morphometric and plumage colour comparisons of the new monal with the Sclater's Monal skins kept in various museums are being carried out.

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## From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from June 1999 to October 2000. We urge that if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

### BHUTAN

A freshly dead **Slaty-breasted Rail** *Gallirallus striatus*, found outside accommodation above Tongsa, central Bhutan on 8th May (KDB/VENT), provided the first Bhutanese record. Two **Booted Warblers** *Hippolais caligata* along Punak Chhu, near Wangdue Phodrang on 6th April (HJ/Earlybird, AB) also appear to be new. **Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula* appeared to form part of a widespread invasion of thrushes this year, with at least 20 on the outskirts of Thimpu (on the road to Cheri) on 5th April and six with other thrushes at Thrumsingla on 13th April (KDB/Ehrlich Group). Four female **Kessler's Thrushes** *T. kessleri* were also on the outskirts of Thimpu on 5th April and five males were found with other thrushes at Thrumsingla (c.3,000 m) on 13th April (KDB/Ehrlich Group). A single **Dusky Thrush** *T. naumanni* was seen between the Jakar and Ura Valleys, Bumthang region on 9th May (KDB/VENT). Other reported rarities were a female **Red-crested Pochard** *Rhodouessa rufina* on new sewerage ponds on the Thimpu Chu, immediately below Thimpu on 5th April (KDB/Ehrlich Group) and a single male **Spot-winged Starling** *Saroglossa spiloptera* midway between Tongsa and Shemgang (c.900 m), central Bhutan on 5th May (KDB/VENT). Also of interest were a pair of **Tawny Fish Owls** *Ketupa flavipes* in forest bordering the Mo Chu (c.1,450 m) on 9th April (KDB/Ehrlich Group) and an adult **Pallas's Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* over Rolong, eastern Bhutan on 19th May (KDB/Ehrlich Group).

### CAMBODIA

Plenty of new species were added to the Cambodian list during the current review period. **Bar-backed Partridge** *Arborophila brunneopectus*, several **Grey Peacock Pheasants** *Polyplectron bicalcaratum* and a male **Red-collared Woodpecker** *Picus rabieri* were all "camera-trapped" in Virachey National Park, Ratanakiri Province, during March (per WWF Cambodia).

Other firsts were: calling **Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoos** *Hierococcyx fugax* in Keo Smaa District (c.260 m), southern Mondolkiri Province on 19th March and in mangroves just south of Kompong Som (Sihanoukville), Kampot Province on 16th April (PD), three **Peaceful Doves** *Geopelia striata* c.7 km south of Thmar Pourk, Bantey Meanchey Province on 29th December and another heard at Jeng Krus Reservoir (same province) on 9th March (both GO), a captive **Rufous-bellied Eagle** *Hieraaetus kienerii* in a private zoo in Teuk Chou, Kampot on 12th October 1999 (CP) and a wild bird seen in Bokor National Park during 23rd-25th December (FG, TS), a captive pair of **Mountain Hawk Eagles** *Spizaetus nipalensis* found in Sihanoukville Zoo on 25th December (CP), a single **Tiger Shrike** *Lanius tigrinus* near Jeng Krus Reservoir on 9th March (GO), at least two pairs of **Indochinese Green Magpies** *Cissa hypoleuca* in central Bokor NP during 27th-29th January (FG, PA, TS), **Ratchet-tailed Treepie** *Temnurus temnurus* on the Mondolkiri Plateau during late May/early June 2000 (RT), a single **Brown-streaked Flycatcher** *Muscicapa williamsoni* at Phnom Kulen National Park on 25th August 1999 (FG), a male **Blue-and-white Flycatcher** *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* in Keo Smaa District on 16th March (PD), **Blue-throated Flycatcher** *Cyornis rubeculoides klossi*, **Yellow-bellied Warbler** *Abroscopus superciliaris* and **Streaked Spiderhunter** *Aracluothera magna* (latter down to 150 m) which were all locally common to common in Keo Smaa and Orang Districts, southern Mondulkiri Province during late March and late April to mid May (PD), at least 20 **Manchurian Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus (agricola) tangorum* at Krous Kraoum on 30th-31st March (JWD, RS, RT, PD, TS, PBu), **Mountain Fulvetta** *Alcippe peracensis annamensis* on the Mondolkiri Plateau during late May/early June 2000 (RT), **Purple-naped Sunbird** *Hypogramma hypogrammicum*, which was fairly common (up to c.350 m) in Keo Smaa District, during late March and late April to mid May (PD) and a group of three **Pin-tailed Parrotfinches** *Erythrura prasina* in Keo Smaa

District (360 m) on 16th May (PD). Other noteworthy records included **Germain's Peacock Pheasant** *Polyplectron germaini*, which was found to be locally fairly common in Snuol Wildlife Sanctuary, eastern Kratie Province and adjacent Keo Smaa and Orang Districts of southern Mondulhiri during late March and late April to mid May (PD), the first recent sight records from Cambodia (confirming information received on its occurrence here). A healthy population (though in slow decline) of **Green Peafowl** *Pavo muticus* was also found in the area of Snuol WS (PD). The highlight of large waterbird counts in Prek Toal, north-west Tonle Sap during 5th-9th April (PD, RT, EB, HC, TS, KO, PBu, FG) was a substantial breeding colony of **Greater Adjutants** *Leptoptilos dubius*, with a minimum count (including chicks) of at least 60 birds (though many more thought to be present). Only about five **Milky Storks** *Mycteria cinerea* were counted but, again, more could easily have been present. At least 84 **Greater Adjutants** were also counted at Krous Kraoum, Kompong Thom on 28th June 2000 (PD, RT, RTi, HC, TS, PBu). **Black-necked Storks** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* have been widely recorded recently, with at least three at Krous Kraoum on 9th and 28th June 2000 and two at Stung Chinit, Kompong Thom on 27th June 2000 (all PD, HC, TS, RTi, PBu, RT). Survey work in Ang Trapeang Thmor Sarus Crane Reserve, Banteay Meanchey, north-west Cambodia during late May and early June 2000 (PD, HC) turned up a **Pallas's Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* (presumed sub-adult), the first recent record, and another **Milky Stork** and **Black-necked Stork**. At least 31 vultures were seen around Khonyek, Mondolhiri, east Cambodia in early June 2000 (RT), comprising at least 11 **White-rumped** *Gyps bengalensis*, 5 **Long-billed** *G. indicus* and 7 **Red-headed** *Sarcogyps calvus*.

## CHINA

Some news was received of rarities observed at Beidaihe and Happy Island this May (JHo, GM, MM, BKi/KingBird). A very tame (presumed exhausted) **Long-billed Plover** *Charadrius placidus* was found near the reservoir on 7th, a single **Black-winged Cuckooshrike** *Coracina melaschistos* was on Happy Island on 14th and another was seen subsequently by other birders at Beidaihe on 19th-20th (it apparently breeds inland in Hebei Province at roughly the same latitude) and two **Tickell's Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus affinis* were on Happy Island on 14th (there is only one

previous record for the area, with the nearest known breeding grounds in south Shaanxi, c.1,000 km to the south-west). Interesting observations from south-east China (TW) included a calling **Black-browed Barbet** *Megalaima oorti* at Qian Jia Dong Reserve in August 1999 (apparently the first from Hunan), 525 **Saunders's Gulls** *Larus saundersi* at Haizao/Jiang Kou, 100 km south of Fuzhou, Fujian on 3rd March, a **Blue-fronted Redstart** *Phoenicurus frontalis* at Dong Ting Hu on 28th February (perhaps new for north-east Hunan) and a small flock of **Godlewski's Buntings** *Emberiza godlewskii* on the summit of Yun Shan, Wugang County, south-west Hunan in September 1999. Three **Black-shouldered Kites** *Elanus caeruleus* were seen on or near Dong Shan Island, southern Fujian in March; the area appears to be a stronghold for the species which is extending its range. In south China, a male **Hill Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis banyumas* was seen near Dong Chong Reservoir, Da Peng Peninsula, Guangdong on the 11th March (JB) and a strong passage of **Brown Shrikes** *Lanius cristatus* was also noted here on 5th May, with at least 39 birds seen during the morning, including at least 24 at Xi Chong (JB). Interesting species seen at Ba Da Gong Shan, north-west Hunan, during 10th-13th August 1999 (JB), included **Temminck's Tragopan** *Tragopan temminckii*, **Chestnut Thrush** *Turdus rubrocanus*, **Ferruginous Flycatcher** *Muscicapa ferruginea*, **Blue-throated Flycatcher** *Cyornis rubeculoides glaucicomans*, **Spotted Laughingthrush** *Garrulax ocellatus* and **Black-headed Sibia** *Heterophasia (melanoleuca) desgodinsi*. At Fanjing Shan, eastern Guizhou in June 1999, the same observer had found **Temminck's Tragopan**, **Large Woodshrike** *Tephrodornis gularis* and **Fujian Niltava** *Niltava davidi*. Interesting records from Bafailin, southern Gaoligong Shan, west Yunnan during 19th-23rd August 2000 (Y-tY, H-fC, H-kY, M-IC, L-xH *et al.*) included three **White-gorgeted Flycatchers** *Ficedula monileger* (pair and juvenile), 10 Bianchi's Warblers *Seicercus valentini*, 20 Yellow-throated Fulvettas *Alcippe cinerea* (see p. 61), a party of five **Wedge-billed Wren Babblers** *Sphenocichla humei*, a single **Fire-tailed Myzornis** *Myzornis pyrrhoura* (3,200 m elevation) and six **Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds** *Anthreptes singalensis*. A visit to Qinghai Province during 11th June-9th July 2000 (JHo, AB, ED, RF, PH, JH, BW) turned up some good records. The following species were apparently not previously recorded from Qinghai: A single **Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* heard near Nangqian Forest Reserve on 30th (RF), a female

**Rufous-bellied Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos hyperythrus* in the Sichuan border forest reserve on 23rd (BW), a single **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* at Qinghai Hu on 14th, up to four **Spot-breasted Scimitar Babblers** *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis dedekeni* in Nangqian FR on 28th and 29th, two to at least 80 **Tibetan Siskins** *Carduelis thibetana* noted daily on the Sichuan border during 21st-23rd and a pair of **Crimson-browed Finches** *Propyrrhula subhimachala* on the Sichuan border on 27th (AB). Qinghai rarities included a single **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* near the Sichuan border on 20th, a **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* at Qinghai Hu on 14th, a **Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* just east of Xining on 8th (JH), and a single **Forest Wagtail** *Deudronanthus indicus* at Nangqian on 30th (BW), perhaps only the third record. Also of interest were up to six **Long-tailed Thrushes** *Zoothera dixonii* on the Sichuan border on 21st-23rd, and one to three daily at the Nangqian FR on 27th-29th. A single **Dark-sided Flycatcher** *Muscicapa sibirica rothschildi* was seen on the Sichuan border on 22nd (AB), and about four birds in Nangqian FR on 27th-29th; it was previously only recorded from Yushu, as well as localities just over the provincial border in Sichuan. **Slaty-backed Flycatcher** *Ficedula hodgsonii* was common in south Qinghai; on the Sichuan border during 20th-23rd and at Nangqian FR during 27th-29th. Two north of Xining on 7th were on the north fringe of the species breeding range (and well to the north-west of its published breeding range).

## INDIA

A good batch of records was received from the Dharamsala area, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh from August 1999 to June 2000 (JW). 20 **Snow Partridges** *Lerwa lerwa* were seen at Indraha (4,200-4,400 m elevation) on 15th November, seven calling **Lesser Cuckoos** *Cuculus poliocephalus* were heard at four different locations (1,800-3,300 m) in May and June and there were three to five **Drongo Cuckoos** *Surniculus lugubris* at Gro (1,000 m) on 30th April-28th May and another at Dharamsala (1,200 m) on 28th May. A decline was noted in the local **White-rumped Vulture** *Gyps bengalensis* population with a maximum of only 20 or less this year, compared to 64 at Gro and 82 at Kanyara (all counted in flight) last August. 23 **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis* were counted migrating in a westerly direction over McLeod Ganj (1,800 m) on 6th

November and an impressive 252 headed west/west north-west over Ghalu ridge (2,200-2,700 m) on 7th November. During return migration, 22 were counted heading east over Dharmkot (2,200 m) on 27th February and another 47 on 10th March. (298 were seen heading eastwards at this site on 10th March 1999, including 171 in just 15 minutes). Single **Rufous-tailed Shrikes** *Lanius isabellinus* were noted at Gaggel (700 m) on 25th September and 2nd November; the observer has found the species to be a regular winter/migration visitor to the area in recent years. As in other recent years, **Spangled Drongo** *Dicrurus hottentottus* was fairly common in summer and autumn (700-1,200 m). Up to two **Long-tailed Thrushes** *Zoothera dixonii* were at Dharmkot during 27th February-10th March and **Chestnut-tailed Starling** *Sturnus malabaricus* was common (700-1,200 m). Lots of **Chaffinches** *Fringilla coelebs* were seen: singles at Dharmkot (2,200 m) on four dates between 31st October and 10th March, with two on 10th November, one at Gaggel (700 m) on 2nd November, up to eight at Ghalu (2,400-2,900 m) during 24th October-28th November and four at Ilaka (3,300 m), on 16th November. **Brambling** *F. montifringilla* also made a good showing, with singles at Dharmkot on 10th November and Ghalu (2,800 m) on 24th October and 6th November, two at Ilaka on 16th November and two at Kanyara (1,200 m) on 3rd January. Both species have been recorded a number of times in recent years. Perhaps of greater interest in Himachal Pradesh, was the discovery of at least 19 singing **Nepal Wren Babblers** *Pnoepyga immaculata* in the Manali area in the last week of May (EV), suggesting (along with recent records from Uttar Pradesh) that the species is more of a western Himalayan bird. The same observer also found a male **Plum-headed Parakeet** *Psittacula cyanocephala* at the exceptionally high altitude of c.2,500 m at Solang on 24th May (EV) and a male **Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula* in the Manali area. Interesting records from Rajasthan included a male **Fire-capped Tit** *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* along the entrance road to Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve on 24th February (RFa) and a male **Slaty-blue Flycatcher** *Ficedula tricolor* at Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur) on 27th February (EV); present since the 5th. In Gujarat, there were 44 **Crab-plovers** *Dromas ardeola* and 76 **Indian Skimmers** *Rynchops albicollis* roosting together (high tide) on a pond at Khajadiya Saltworks, near Jamnagar on 4th-5th March (RFa). At Baga Fields, Goa, a single **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* on 9th-10th February (RFa, PL, SDu et

al.) was unusual and a nest of **Malabar Lark** *Galerida malabarica* with two young was discovered on 11th February (RFa); an early date? A single **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* at Merim, Goa on 13th-19th February (SDu) was well south of its documented range. A single **Black-headed Ibis** *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, at Farraka Barrage, Malda District, West Bengal on 20th June 2000 (ASh) was unusual, as was an adult **Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis* at Bannerghatta National Park, Bangalore on 3rd February (SM, MK *et al.*). In eastern Assam this spring, a juvenile **Himalayan Griffon** *Gyps himalayensis* at Digboi Oilfields on 24th and 28th March was interesting (CRo, EV). At Dibru Saikhowa National Park (recently redesignated), a pair and two single **Black-breasted Parrotbills** *Paradoxornis flavirostris* were located in the park proper for the first time, on the north bank of the Dibru River, c.5 km east north-east of Guijan on 30th-31st March (CRo, EV, DH). Two singing "Swamp" **Prinias** *Prinia (burnesii) cinerascens* (one paired) were found on the south bank of the Dibru River c.2-3 km east of Guijan on 30th March (CRo, EV, DH). Other noteworthy records here were a single **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus* on 29th March, a **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* on 30th March and a pair of **Spot-throated Babblers** *Pelloroneum albiventris* feeding a recently fledged juvenile on 1st April (CRo, EV); a surprising record from this lowland site. Other breeding records at Dibru Saikhowa NP (CRo, EV, DH) were much earlier than is suggested by popular literature on the region and many species clearly begin breeding in late February in lowland Assam. **Marsh Babbler** *P. palustre* was seen carrying probable food (breeding evidently well-progressed) on 29th March and **Chestnut-capped Babbler** *Timalia pileata* and **White-bellied Yuhina** *Yuhina zantholenca* were found with dependent fledged young on 1st April. At Kaziranga National Park, three **Pale-capped Pigeons** *Columba punicea* flew over the Central Range on 7th April (CRo, EV) and **Spotted Redshank** was common during 4th-9th April (CRo, EV, DH). Single calling **Oriental Cuckoos** *C. saturatus* were heard at Panbari Reserved Forest on 8th and 9th April (CRo, EV, DH). Early breeding records here were a nest of **Pale-chinned Flycatcher** *Cyornis poliogenys* with small young on 6th April and an **Abbott's Babbler** *Malacocincla abbotti* carrying food on 8th April (CRo). At Guwahati, a maximum of 66 **Greater Adjutants** *Leptoptilos dubius* were counted at a roost-site on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River on 21st March

(CRo, DH). In Meghalaya this spring, **Tawny-breasted Wren Babbler** *Spelaeoris longicaudatus* was found singing above Shillong, near Mawjrong and at Mawphlang during 12th-15th April (CRo, EV, DH) and later at Wahbareit (along the road towards Bangladesh) on 5th May (EV). It appeared to be common, occurring in non-forest habitat (secondary growth, dense fern growth etc.) as well as undergrowth in forest. **Russet Bush Warbler** *Bradypterus seebohuni* was common above Shillong and also heard at Mawphlang and **Grey-cheeked Warbler** *Seicercus poliogenys* was nest-building at the latter site on 15th April (CRo). Two **Purple Cochoas** *Cochoa purpurea* were seen in the Barail Range above Jatinga, North Cachar (south Assam) along with two **Green Cochoas** *C. viridis* on 18th April (CRo, DH), where two more early breeding records were **Grey-chinned Minivet** *Pericrocotus solaris* with an occupied nest on 20th April and a **Streaked Wren Babbler** *Napothera brevicaudata* nest-building on 21st April (CRo, EV, DH).

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## INDONESIA

### Riau Archipelago

An immature **Christmas Island Frigatebird** *Fregata andrewsi* seen near Tg Balai, Karimum Besar on 2nd October 1999 (AC, KKe, LKS, AO) was the first record for the Riau Archipelago. Also of interest here were two **Swinhoe's Storm-petrels** *Oceanodroma monorhis* and up to four **Aleutian Terns** *Sterna aleutica*.

### Sulawesi

An **Oriental Hobby** *Falco severus* was seen at a nest at Lompobattang, south Sulawesi on 18th and 20th September 1999 (AJ).

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## MALAYSIA

### Peninsular Malaysia

The most amazing record received was of an adult breeding-plumaged **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* among terns at Kapar Power Station, near Kuala Selangor on 1st April (GT, PV, MC, MT). The species has not previously been recorded from the "Oriental" region. Elsewhere, a male **Thick-billed Green Pigeon** *Treeron curvirostra* at Paya Beach, Pulau Tioman on 29th March (SR) was the first record from the island, a single **Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus* was seen off Pengerang, Johor on 26th March (SR) and there was a single **Great-billed Heron** *Ardea sumatrana* on mudflats

along the Johor coast, by the second link bridge to Singapore, on 13th May (DG, PG, LKC, SR).

### Sabah

A single **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (rare in Sabah) was found on a small pond near Gomontong Forest Reserve, eastern Sabah on 2nd March (KDB/VENT). A female **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* (another scarce species) was seen at 1,220 m on Mount Kinabalu, on 23rd February (KDB/VENT). Likas Bay Nature Reserve, Kota Kinabalu, held two **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* and a flock of 27 **Black-headed Gulls** *Larus ridibundus* on 23rd February (KDB/VENT).

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## MONGOLIA

During a trip organised by Dr. Koch Reisen to central Mongolia in June 2000 (HGF *et al.*) three new species were recorded for the country: an **Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* among **Common Terns** *S. hirundo* at Ogii Nuur, Arkhangai Province on 5th, and a **Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus* and two **Black Drongos** *Dicrurus macrocercus* at a tourist camp in the Gobi near Dalandzadgad, Omnogov' Province, on 14th. Other reported vagrants this spring were a **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* at Duruu Nuur, Dornod Province on 5th May (CK), the second Mongolian record, a singing **Clamorous Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus stentoreus* west of Lun, Tov or Ovorkhangai Province on 4th June (HGF *et al.*) and a **Grey-streaked Flycatcher** *Muscicapa griseisticta* in the valley of the Terelj Gol, Khentii Mountains, Tov Province on 19th June (HGF *et al.*). Two single **Chinese Pond Herons** *Ardeola bacchus* were seen during a canoe trip on the Kherlen Gol, Khentii Province: west of Bayan Monk on 1st June and south-west of Ondorkhaan on 4th June (ASi, HSi). Also of interest were single male **Baikal Teals** *Anas formosa* at Khukh Nuden Nuur, Dornod Province, on 26th May (CK) and at a steppe lake west of Lun, Tov on 3rd June (HGF *et al.*). Good numbers of the globally threatened **Swan Goose** *Anser cygnoides* were recorded in the valley of the Gobi Lakes, Bayankhongor Province on 25th June 2000, with 170 (mainly families, including young) at the north side of Boon Tsagaan Nuur and 82 at the east side of Orog Nuur (HM). A count of 850 **Mute Swans** *Cygnus olor* at Orog Nuur the same day was the highest ever from Mongolia, and three families among them may constitute the first evidence of breeding from the country (HM). A single **Eastern Curlew** *Numenius madagascariensis*

at Orog Nuur on 23rd June and nine **Relict Gulls** *Larus relictus* at the south-east side of Boon Tsagaan Nuur on 30th June were also of note (HM). An expedition studying waders in Dornod Province, east Mongolia (CK), found a total of 18 **Relict Gulls** at several wetlands between 15th May and 10th June 2000, and an active nest at a small steppe lake. Approximately six leg-flagged **Red-necked Stints** *Calidris ruficollis* (all flagged in Australia) were observed, and amazingly, a trapped bird (out of eight caught in total) also carried an Australian ring. It had been banded 200 km south-east of Melbourne in April 1998. At least five species of cranes were observed during the reporting period, including a **Red-crowned Crane** *Grus japonensis* in Dornod Province (no details available yet). **White-naped Cranes** *G. vipio* were breeding in much smaller numbers in Dornod than in 1999, due to very dry conditions (OG). A pair of this species observed near a nest at Ogii Nuur, probably represents the westernmost breeding record world-wide (HGF *et al.*). A remarkable sight was over 200 **Greater Sand Plovers** *Charadrius leschenaultii*, 45 **Oriental Plovers** *C. veredus* and an **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at a salt lake in the Gobi near Mandal Ovoo, Omnogov' Province on 14th June 2000 (HGF *et al.*). Reports of nightbirds from the taiga of northern Mongolia, in the valley of the Onon Gol, Khentii Province, included calling **Oriental Scops Owls** *Otus sunia* near Dadal in mid June 2000 and near Binder on 22nd June; the latter site also held calling individuals of both **European Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus* and **Grey Nightjar** *C. indicus* (ASi, HSi).

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## LAOS

The only record received was of at least three **White-browed Crakes** *Porzana cinerea* at Nong Pen Lake, near Vientiane on 5th and 8th March (TE); a new species for the country.

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## NEPAL

An adult male **Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis* at Patnali (Dharan) Forest on 4th March (TG, BC/Naturetrek group) was a new species for Nepal. Two more firsts, if accepted, were a flock of 10 **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* in transitional plumage near Kushaha, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve on 12th May (DD *et al.*) and a female **Black-breasted Thrush** *Turdus dissimilis* near Koshi Tappu Wildlife Camp, Koshi Tappu WR on 25th February (RKa, KS). Other rarities during the



current review period were: a single **Fulvous Whistling-duck** *Dendrocygna bicolor* near Kushaha on 14th January and later at Koshi Barrage on 16th February, where it stayed for about a week (TG, SB, SGC, BC), a single **Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus* at Pipar (2,745 m elevation) on 16th November (GF, AP), at least four **Black-tailed Crakes** *Porzana bicolor* (family?) seen very well just outside Jiri, Everest Trek on 7th October 1999 (HJ, HCh/Earlybird), the first modern record from Nepal (possibly the first ever) and a **Dark-sided Thrush** *Zoothera marginata* behind Chitwan Jungle Lodge on 21st February (WW, HB/Naturetrek group). Last winter saw an impressive thrush invasion. There were many **Eurasian Blackbirds** *Turdus merula* in Sagamatha National Park during 27th December-1st January (TC, DC), including as many as 100 at Dingboche on 30th December, and over 150 **Kessler's Thrushes** *T. kessleri* were counted at Dingboche on 29th December and another 100 east of there the next day (TC, DC). Two **Chestnut-tailed Starlings** *Sturnus malabaricus* were found at the unusually high altitude of 3,800 m at Lo Manthang on 2nd November (HB, SO, PB, IJ). Several calling **Nepal Wren Babblers** *Pnoepyga immaculata* were found at Surkhe, below Lukla on 18th October 1999 (HCh), a new locality for the species.

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## PHILIPPINES

Interesting records from Palawan this September (JG) included an **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and seven **Eastern Curlews** *Numenius madagascariensis* on Snake Island, off Puerto Princesa and a single **Rufous Night Heron** *Nycticorax caledonicus* along the channel next to Mary's Resort, St. Paul National Park. In addition, some news was received from Rasa Island off Narra, south-central Palawan (per JG). **Grey Imperial Pigeons** *Ducula pickeringii* apparently outnumber **Green Imperial Pigeons** *D. aenea* and **Mantanani Scops Owl** *Otus mantananensis* is also present. However, the most important news from the island is of a flock of at least 50 **Philippine Cockatoos** *Cacatua haematuropygia* which can be seen at dawn and dusk at the north end of the island (where they roost).

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## SINGAPORE

A male **Siberian Rubythroat** *Luscinia calliope* seen at Marina East on 21st December (HS) was new for Singapore. The female **Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* mentioned in Bulletin 31 was first seen at

Tanah Merah (Changi Central South) on 25th December (AC, KKe, AL, LKC, LKS), while the **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* was still present on 2nd January (IL, LKS, TPL), 13th February (AL, RO, SW, SR) and 2nd March (SW, SR). In addition to the above, the strong North-East Monsoon conditions and exceptional high tides around Christmas 1999 were responsible for several rare migrants turning up at Tanah Merah, including up to two **Spoon-billed Sandpipers** *C. pygmaeus* on 25th-28th December (AC, KKe, LKC, LKS, AO, OTP, YDL), with one seen on 5th January (SW, SR), 4th (LKC, RW, SR) and 13th February (AL, RO, SW, SR), a juvenile **Brown-headed Gull** *Larus brunnicephalus* (third record), on 25th December (AC, KKe, LB) and an **Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* (third record) on 19th-25th December (WEH). Other good records here were a male **Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* on 6th December (SW) and 4 **Vinous-breasted Starlings** *Sturnus burmaunicus* on 19th December (IL, LKS, TPL). Elsewhere, noteworthy records during the current review period included a female **Northern Shoveler** (reported a couple of days before) at Serangoon on 2nd (SW, SR) and 4th February (LKC, RW, SR), a **Large Hawk Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx sparveroides* at Tuas on 17th November (KKe), an hepatic female **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* at Bukit Batok Nature Park on 8th February (LKC, SR), a single **Dunlin** *C. alpina* (probably the fourth record) at Sungei Buloh Nature Park on 27th February (CA, SBo, LKC, SR), a juvenile **Pied Harrier** *Circus melanoleucos* at Serangoon on 29th January (SR) and 11th March (AC, LKC, SR), a sub-adult dark morph **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* at Serangoon on 22nd January (DO, LKC, SR), an adult **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* (possibly of dubious origin) at Kranji and nearby Pang Sua from 20th November (LKK, LKS) until 18th December (AC) and a juvenile at Tanah Merah on 26th December (NSS), an adult **Malayan Night Heron** *Gorsachius melanolophus* at Bukit Timah NR on 28th January (RO, SW, SR), an **Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis* at Bukit Batok from 19th December (IL, LKS, TPL, YDL) until at least 8th January (LB, YDL), a female **Orange-headed Thrush** *Zoothera citrina* (found earlier) at Bukit Timah NR on 28th January (SR), a single **Vinous-breasted Starling** at Pulau Ubin on 3rd May (SR), single **Dusky Warblers** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (probably the third to fifth records) at Sungei Buloh NP freshwater ponds on 19th January (SR), at Pulau Ubin between 31st January and 17th March (SR) and at Serangoon leachate pond on 2nd February (SW, SR), a single

**Pale-legged Leaf Warbler** *P. tenellipes* (probably the second record) in mangroves at Pulau Ubin on 23rd March (AD, RO, SR), a juvenile **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* at Changi Central South marsh on 4th January (SR) and two **Richard's Pipits** *Anthus richardi* at Changi Central South marsh on 4th January (RO, EL, SR) and 2nd March (SW, SR). The **Yellow-eared Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera chrysogenys* at Mandai Orchid Garden was still present on 19th December (OKS, YDL) and 19th January (SR). Interesting breeding records included a male **Greater Painted-snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* with two chicks at Changi Central South marsh on 17th February (PDo, RO, SR), a new early breeding date, and an adult **Straw-headed Bulbul** *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* (reported earlier) on a nest at Bukit Batok Nature Park on 8th February (LKC, SR), the first record for the main island.

## SRI LANKA

A **Bay-backed Shrike** *Lanius vittatus* near Bundala Village, Southern Province on 2nd and 3rd February (WA, PHo, WM, PO) would be the first from Sri Lanka if accepted. A single "**Hume's**" **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca althaea* near Kalametiya Bird Sanctuary, Southern Province on 6th February (WA, PHo, WM, PO) was apparently also well out of range.

## TAIWAN

Another batch of records was received for the first half of 2000. There were two new species for the country: two **Pallas's Gulls** *Larus ichthyaetus* at Pu-tai, Chiayi on 19th January (C-YT) and a single **Verditer Flycatcher** *Euomyias thalassina* at Fu-yuan, Hwalien on 17th February (C-WL). Reported vagrants during the current review period were: a single **Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* at Lan-yang Estuary on 21st May (W-HF), four **Greylag Geese** *Anser anser* at Lin-pien, Pingtung on 1st-21st January (KC *et al.*), two **Swan Geese** *A. cygnoides* at Lan-yang River, Ilan during January-February (S-HL), an **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* at Szu-tsau, Tainan on 11th January (Y-TF), a **Canvasback** *Aythya valisineria* at Kang-nan, Hsinchu on 5th March (K-AL), single **Ruddy Kingfishers** *Halcyon coromanda* at Yehliu, Taipei on 12th-15th May (S-CC) and Hua-yu, Penghu Archipelago on 2nd May (K-YH), a **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** *Clamator coromandus* at Yeh-liu, Taipei on 14th February (DiR), 27th April (H-CY), and 6th May (H-CL), two **Nordmann's**

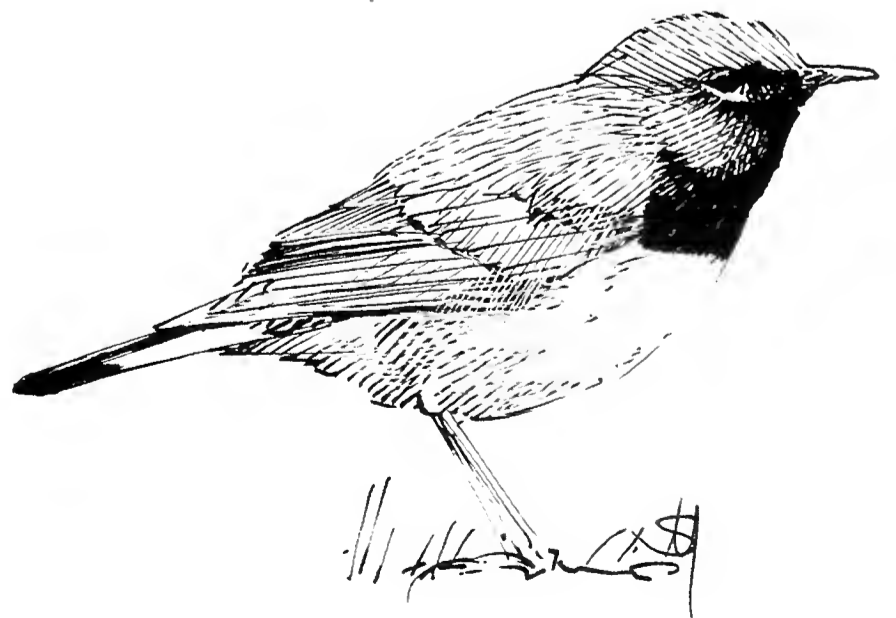
**Greenshanks** *Tringa guttifer* at Tseng-wen Estuary, Tainan on 18th May (Y-TF), three **Long-billed Dowitchers** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Wen-ti, Ilan on 23rd-27th February (C-PC) and Szu-tsau, Tainan on 6th April (S-FH), two **Western Sandpipers** *Calidris mauri* at Ta-chuan, Hsinchu on 1st May (S-MM), 13 **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* at Ling-pien, Pingtung on 1st January (KC) and Pei-men, Tainan on 21st February (M-CH), two **Pied Harriers** *Circus melanoleucos* at Hua-yu, Penghu Archipelago on 31st March (K-YH), single **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* at Penghu Archipelago in February-March (C-HL) and Fu-yang, Taipei on 23rd January (H-KW), a single **Merlin** *Falco columbarius* at Han-his, Ilan on 5th May (L-CH), a **Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* at Nan-kan, Matzu (S-MW), a **Horned Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* at Chih-tan, Taipei on 9th-10th January (C-TL, C-HL), a **Black Bittern** *Dupetor flavicollis* at Ta-hu, Ilan on 10th May (K-TL), a single **Von Schrenck's Bittern** *Ixobrychus eurhythmus* at Wan-an, Penghu Archipelago on 27th May (C-W Hsu), an **Oriental Stork** *Ciconia boyciana* at Auku, Chiayi during March-April (C-Y Tsai) and Chin-shan, Taipei on 7th May (L-PH), two **Black Storks** *C. nigra* at Chih-pen, Taitung on 23rd January (C-JL), a single **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* at Chin-shan, Taipei on 3rd April (M-FL, C-ST), single **Black-winged Cuckooshrikes** *Coracina melaschistos* at Ing-ta, Pingtung on 27th February (J-KL) and Yeh-liu, Taipei on 3rd May (M-LC, M-CT), 24 **Ashy Minivets** *Pericrocotus divaricatus* at Jen-shan, Ilan on 3rd April (C-FT), an **Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus* at Kou-hu, Yunlin on 27th May (H-CC), four **Spangled Drongos** *D. hottentottus* at Yeh-liu, Taipei on 23rd April (M-CH), a single **Siberian Thrush** *Zoothera sibirica* at Li-chia, Chiayi on 30th April (K-CY), a **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** *Ficedula zanthopygia* at Penghu Archipelago on 15th May (C-SC), two **Blue-and-white Flycatchers** *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* at Yeh-liu, Taipei on 16th April (S-CC), a **Siberian Blue Robin** *Luscinia cyane* at Yeh-liu, Taipei on 21st April (M-RH), two **Bluethroats** *L. svecica* at Kuan-tu, Taipei on 11th March (M-CH), a **Japanese Waxwing** *Bombycilla japonica* at Ta-chuan, Hsinchu on 5th-6th February (H-LL), a **Pallas's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus* at Yeh-liu, Taipei on 22nd April (M-LC), a single **Pale-legged Leaf Warbler** *P. tenellipes* at Yeh-liu, Taipei on 16th April (K-YY), then two on 20th April (I-YC), a **Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus* at Swei-shan, Chiayi on 28th May (K-CY), a **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* at Ta-yuan, Taoyuan on 15th April (Y-MH), two **Pallas's**

**Buntings** *Emberiza pallasii* at Tung-kan, Ilan on 16th April (ML-C) and 12 **Japanese Grosbeaks** *Eophona personata* at Pei-tou, Taipei on 23rd-24th April (I-YC). High counts of globally threatened species included 430 **Black-faced Spoonbills** *Platalea minor* at Tseng-wen Estuary, Tainan on 2nd February, 24 **Chinese Egrets** *Egretta eulophotes* and 20 **Asian Dowitchers** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Ta-chuan, Hsinchu on 1st May (S-MM) and 220 **Saunders's Gulls** *Larus saundersi* at His-kang, Changhwa on 13th January (H-CY).

## THAILAND

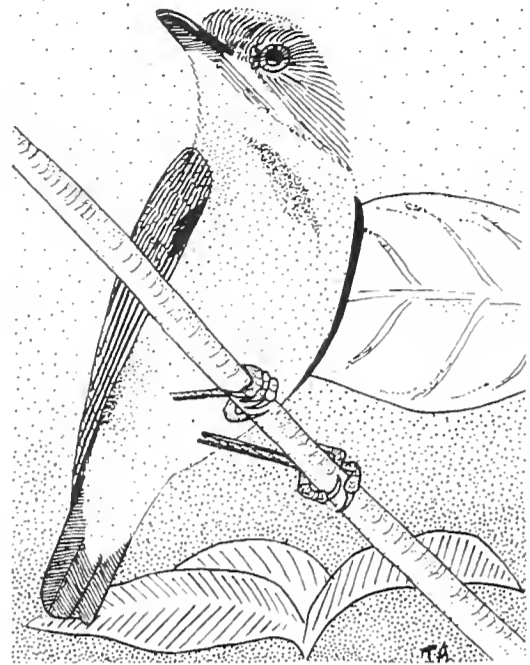
The biggest surprise of the period was a dark morph **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus*, a new bird for Thailand, sitting on a salt pan at Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon on 10th April, and subsequently taken into captivity (SD). The bird was examined and photographed on 12th April (BB, RJ, PK, PR); though clearly weak and emaciated, it was consuming small fish but sadly died a few days later. Two extreme rarities were found in NW Thailand, a female **Japanese Robin** *Erithacus akahige* (the third Thai record) seen and photographed at Phu Luang Wildlife Sanctuary, Loei (1,365 m elevation) on 11th March (DP, WS, BT) and a male and female **Blackthroat** *Luscinia obscura* observed coming to drink at a small stream in lowland forest at Mae Jarim National Park, Nan (c.300 m) on 18th March (ST). This is the first sight record of the latter species in Thailand. Four **Brahminy Starlings** *Sturnus pagodarum* at the Mae Krasat Substation, Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary on 2nd January (PC) provided the second Thai record and the first from W Thailand. **Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill** *Paradoxornis atrosuperciliaris* was recorded at Mae Moei National Park, Tak during 24th-25th June 2000 at only c.700 m elevation (NT). This is a significant extension of its known range in Thailand, and begs the question why has it not been recorded away from the extreme north before. Many more interesting records were received from Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary, Yala and Narathiwat Provinces during late March to early May (ST). New high elevation records from the Hala sector were, **Checker-throated Woodpecker** *Picus mentalis* at 1,300 m elevation on 2nd April, **Maroon Woodpecker** *Blythipicus rubiginosus* at 1,200 m on 2nd and 3rd April, **Banded Broadbill** *Eurylaimus javanicus* at 1,100 m on 5th April, **Japanese Paradise-flycatcher** *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* at 1,200 m on 2nd and 5th April and **Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker**

*Prionochilus percussus* at 1,200 m. A **Striped Wren Babbler** *Kenopia striata* was also reported at 1,050 m on 3rd and 5th April, much higher than previously recorded in Thailand. New records for extreme S Thailand included **Red-headed Trogon** *Harpactes erythrocephalus*, **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo**, *Dicrurus remifer*, **Little Pied Flycatcher**, *Ficedula westermanni*, **Large Niltava**, *Niltava grandis*, **Hill Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis banyumas*, **Mountain Bulbul** *Hypsipetes mccllellandii*, **Chestnut-crowned Warbler** *Seicercus castaniceps*, **White-browed Shrike Babbler** *Pteruthius flaviscapis* and **Streaked Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera magna* (the latter new for the south as a whole). A male **Mrs Hume's Pheasant** *Syrmaticus humiae* was photographed along the road to the summit of Doi Pui on 22nd April (SS). According to park officials, although other Galliformes have previously been released on the mountain, there have never been releases of this species. This is the second sighting on Doi Pui in a little over a year; indicating that the species has either recolonised the mountain naturally or, more likely, that the small population documented as present until the early 1930s has remained undetected by ornithologists for 70 years. Last winter was another good one for waterfowl. A female or immature **Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* at Bung Boraphet (said to have been present since 28th December) was seen on 27th February (PR, UT, TY, WY) and another was photographed on a distillery waste water body at Chiang Rak, Ayutthaya on 5th February (WSu). Seven **Ruddy Shelducks** *Tadorna ferruginea* were present on the Mekong River at Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai together with a drake **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* on 12th (ST) and 19th February, (SK, SP, PS, SSi). Three **Spot-billed Ducks** *Anas poecilorhyncha* were reported from Bang Phra, Chonburi on 4th March (KC, WN, per PC),



Blackthroat *Luscinia obscura* by Simon Mustoe

apparently the first from SE Thailand. At Nong Bong Khai, Chiang Rai, the female **Mandarin Duck** *Aix galericulata* was still present on 26th January (WP) and the drake **Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* remained until at least 19th February, (SK, SP, PS, SSi). **Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina* was present at Bung Boraphet, Nakhon Sawan again, with one seen on 7th February (PM) and two there on 27th February (PR, UT, TY, WY). At least ten bird photographers queued up to take photographs of an adult **White-fronted Scops Owl** *Otus sagittatus* roosting with a brood of three young at Ban Krang, Kaeng Krachan National Park, Phetchaburi on 21st May (per WS *et al.*). On 26th and 27th May, a call of the species was taped (PR, CR). This was a deep soft drumming, up to 12-13 seconds in duration, unlike anything previously attributed to the species. A **Buffy Fish Owl** *Ketupa ketupu*, reported from Km 17, Kaeng Krachan on 8th July 2000 (KUWC) would be new for W Thailand. Eight **Pale-capped Pigeons** *Columba punicea* were seen in mangroves at Thung Kha, Sawi District, Chumphon on 23rd-24th September 2000 (WY/BCST). A single **Thick-billed Green Pigeon** *Treron curvirostra* and a **Hill Myna** *Gracula religiosa* were found in Lumpini Park, Bangkok on 22nd December (PC) but may have escaped from captivity. A remarkable report from Ko Surin, Phang-nga was of up to 18 **Large Green Pigeons** *T. capellei*, seen feeding in fig trees during 30th January-1st February (DP,WS). Up to five **Orange-breasted Green Pigeons** *T. biciucta* were also there on 4th February (DP,WS). Two **White-bellied Green Pigeons** *T. sieboldii* were reported from Tham Pha Phlong, Doi Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary on 22nd March (ST). The long-staying **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris pygmeus* at Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon was seen in late January (BCST) and on 8th February (Wings) but not subsequently; though the **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*, another long-stayer at the same site was still present a full month later, on 8th March (KK, CC, PD). On Ko Libong, Trang, an **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and no fewer than 26 **Nordmann's Greenshanks** *Tringa guttifer* were among other waders photographed on 11th February (KS,ST). On 24th June 2000 (PR), mudflats at Bang Poo held **Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus*, **Greater Sand Plover** *C. leschenaultii*, **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* and **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica*; all possible new summer records. No fewer than 18 **Eurasian Thick-knees** *Burhinus oedicephalus* were observed at Takhli Airforce Base, east north-east of Muang Chainat, Nakhon Sawan



Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker  
*Prionochilus percussus* by Tim Allwood

on 24th June 2000 (ST). **Great Thick-knees** *Esacus recurvirostris* were seen at two sites on the Mekong River: a single bird upstream of Pakchom, Loei on 21st April (PR) and a group of 4 downstream of Khemmaraj, Amnat Charoen on 26th April (PR, SRO, NR); it had previously been found at both sites by observers working the Lao bank of the Mekong. Another bird was captured on video at Kalong, Samut Sakhon on 30th September 2000 (per PR) and remained until at least 4th October (UT). A pair of **Beach Thick-knees** *E. neglectus* was reported from Ko Surin Tai, Phang-nga on 15th December (AS). A **Grey-tailed Tattler** *Heteroscelus brevipes* on a sandbank of the Mekong River between Mukdahan and Savannakhet in Laos on 26th April (PR, SRO) qualifies as the first record for Laos and Thailand (and seemingly the first non-coastal record anywhere in SE Asia). Two **Common Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius hiaticula* were reported from the Mekong River at Chiang Saen on 13th February (ST) and there was another at Khok Kham on 25th February (SH,GP), which was the first from Central Thailand. A pale morph adult **Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarina* was seen during a boat-trip between Ko Surin and Khura Buri on 18th December (AS), while another **Slender-billed Gull** *Larus genei* was reported from Bang Poo on 8th February (KS,ST). A first winter **Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* photographed at the same site on 29th November 1999 is the first record from South-East Asia (STh). The only interesting raptor records received were of a pale morph **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* near Mae Wong National Park, Kampeng Phet on 26th January (AM) and an adult **Mountain Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis*, reported from Ko

Adang, Tarutao on 25th February (PS). There were also few records of large waterbirds. Single **Darters** *Anhinga melanogaster* were seen at Kroeng Krai Substation, Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Uthai Thani on 18th December (PVo) and on the Srinagarind Dam, Tha Rua Ongsit, Srisawat District, Kanchanaburi on 14th April (GB). A **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* on the Mekong River upstream of Chiang Saen over the New Year (JWD) and again on 13th February (ST) was unusual, as was an **Indian Pond Heron** *Ardeola grayii* in breeding plumage on mudflats at Bang Poo on 24th June 2000 (PR). Both **Hooded Pitta** *Pitta sordida* and **Blue-winged Pitta** *P. moluccensis* were calling at Phu Wua Wildlife Sanctuary, Nong Khai on 23rd April (PR), providing a range extension for both into the north-east of NE Thailand, though they could have been either breeding visitors or passage migrants. Excellent numbers of thrushes were recorded last winter. **Red-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis ruficollis* was widely reported, with at least one at Doi Pha Hom Pok, Chiang Mai on 20th-21st January, another at Doi Ang Khang on 3rd February (UT) and three in the radar station grounds on the summit of Doi Inthanon on 20th February (SK, SP, SSi). A male **Eurasian Blackbird** *T. merula* was again present at Huai Thung Thao, Chiang Mai on 21st January (KS), a male **Black-breasted Thrush** *T. dissimilis* was seen at Doi Wao, Nanthaburi National Park, Nan on 29th January (RJ), and a female **Siberian Thrush** *Zoothera sibirica* was reported from the summit of Doi Inthanon on 8th January (TT). Large numbers of **Grey-winged Blackbirds** *T. boulboul* were widely reported in the North-West. A number of other birds recorded at Mae Jarim NP, Nan during 10th-22nd March (ST) were new but expected distributional records from the eastern part of NW Thailand: **Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*, **Limestone Wren Babbler** *Napothera crispifrons*, **Manchurian Bush Warbler** *Cettia canturians* and **Small Niltava** *Niltava macgrigoriae*. **White-capped Water Redstarts** *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* were reported from Phaa Thaan Waterfall, Thamsakeun National Park, Nan on 31st January (RJ) and Wang Kaew Waterfall, Doi Luang National Park, Lampang on 2nd February (PK); the latter apparently the first from eastern NW Thailand. Several pairs of **Jerdon's Bushchats** *Saxicola jerdoni* including at least one pair with fledged young, on the Mekong River sandbanks of Loei Province on 21st April (PR) provided a range extension into north-west NE Thailand. The

spread of **White-vented Myna** *Acridotheres grandis* throughout S Thailand continues; one was seen in Yala Town on 20th May (RJ). There are now pockets of birds in Ranong, Phangnga, Krabi, Trang and apparently Nakhon Si Thammarat. Also noteworthy were four **Large Hawk Cuckoos** *Hierococcyx sparveriioides* reported from Ko Libong on 10th February (SJ, KS, ST) and a **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* reported from Sanpatong, Chiang Mai on 19th January (KS). Large numbers of **Spot-winged Grosbeaks** *Mycerobas melanozanthos* were present at Fang Hot Springs, Mae Fang National Park, Chiang Mai, with 30 on 9th February (EK, PK), 40 on 14th February (ST) and apparently as many as 300 on 5th March (SKo per BK). There were over 200 **Black-headed Greenfinches** *Carduelis ambigua* at Doi Ang Khang on 18th February (ST). Some interesting breeding records were also received for 2000. A nest of **Eared Pitta** *Pitta phayrei* was found at Kaeng Krachan NP on 7th July 2000 (PE) and a second nest with incubating bird was seen nearby on 16th July (many observers). Other new late breeding dates were **Streak-breasted Woodpecker** *Picus viridanus* feeding fledged young at Ban Krang, Kaeng Krachan NP on 27th May (CR, PR) and **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* with three recently hatched young at Bang Poo on 22nd July (PR). New early breeding dates were provided with records of **Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* nest-building at Den Ya Khat, Doi Chiang Dao W.S. on 23rd February, **Red-billed Blue Magpie** *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* nest-building at Huai Thung Thao, Chiang Mai on 10th February (ST), a pair of **Black-eared Shrike Babblers** *Pteruthius melanotis* attending a nest at Km 37.5 on Doi Inthanon on 20th February (SK, SP, SSi), **Grey-headed Parrotbill** *Paradoxornis gularis* with nest-material at Den Ya Khat on 15th February (ST) and a nest-building **Green-tailed Sunbird** *Aethopyga uipalensis* at Doi Inthanon on 18th February (RK). Two or three pairs of **Black-collared Starlings** *Sturnus nigricollis* were reported to have been parasitised by **Asian Koels** *Eudynamys scolopacea* and were seen feeding young koels in Phanat Nikhom District, Chonburi on 24th May (CAs). This would be a new host for the species.

## VIETNAM

A single **Japanese Paradise-flycatcher** *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* near Lo Qui Ho (Sa Pa region), in spring 2000 (JE *et al.*) was the first from W Tonkin, while in E Tonkin, there was an eclipse male

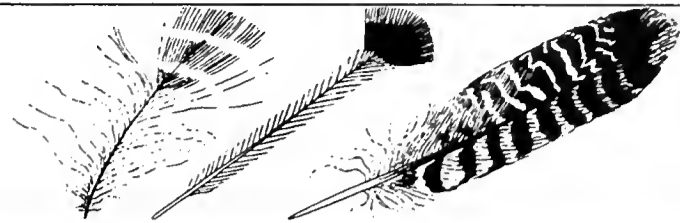
**Baer's Pochard** *Aythya baeri* with many other wintering ducks on a series of dams at the edge of Cuc Phuong National Park on 8th February (KDB/VENT) and a **Long-billed Plover** *Charadrius placidus* with a mixed flock of shorebirds midway between Hanoi and Cuc Phuong NP on 6th February (KDB/VENT). In the south, one or two **Rusty-rumped Warblers** *Locustella certhiola* at Ho Tuyen Lam, near Da Lat in April (TL, CQ), were the first from S Annam. At Xuan Thuy, Red River Delta, there was a **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata* on 24th September 2000 (JE, PJ, JT), 14 **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* on 23rd September 2000 and three during 7th-8th October 2000 (JE), a **Tiger Shrike** *Lanius tigrinus* on 23rd September 2000 (JE, PJ, JT) and a **Maroon Oriole** *Oriolus traillii* (subspecies not specified) during 7th-8th October 2000 (JE).

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See p. 52 for a note about the Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* record in *OBC Bull.* 31: 49

# Stray Feathers



## Third International Hornbill Workshop

The Third International Hornbill Workshop is scheduled to take place in Phuket, Thailand between 9 and 12 May, 2001. The general theme will be hornbill ecology with an emphasis on reproduction and population. Specific topics will include factors influencing reproduction of hornbills in the wild and in captivity, recent findings in hornbill biology, food and feeding ecology of hornbills and their exploitation by humans. There will also be a post-workshop excursion to Budo-Sungai Padi National Park and Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary, located in southern Thailand, where participants will be able to observe an on-going research programme conducted with the participation of villagers

who have been persuaded to turn from being hornbill chick poachers to research assistants. For further information, please contact: Secretariat, Dr Pilai Poonswad, Hornbill Research Foundation, c/o Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Rama 6 Road, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. Tel. +662 2460063 ext. 4606; Fax +662 6445411. Email [scpps@mucc.mahidol.ac.th](mailto:scpps@mucc.mahidol.ac.th)

## Wetlands and Birds Korea

The Korean Wetlands Alliance has officially reorganised into a new group with the English name of "Wetlands and Birds Korea". It is a small NGO working on wetland and bird conservation issues in South Korea and throughout the Yellow Sea region. The group's work will be focused on wetland

environmental education, popularising birding-based ecotourism, bird surveying and publication of associated materials and it will be conducted in support of local communicators and educators, good government conservation initiatives and other NGOs and researchers. If available, staff will try to help answer the queries of visiting birders and wetland specialists....

increasingly hard work as more and more people are realising that South Korea is a great birding destination, with wetland specialities such as Baikal Teal, Relict Gull and Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Contact <http://www.wetlandbird.or.kr>, <http://www.wetlandfriends@hotmail.com> or Nial Moores, Sanghun Bldg, 2F, Hoiwon 1-Dong, Hoiwon-Gu, Masan City, Kyungam, South Korea.

## BIRDS OF KOSHI

An up-to-date and fully comprehensive checklist of the birds recorded from Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve and Koshi Barrage annotated with status and references has just been published by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN). The checklist which has been compiled by Hem Sagar Baral, the President of

BCN, is available from Carol Inskipp, 1 Herneside, Welney, Wisbech, Cambs PE14 9SB, UK, cost £2.

## KOSHI CAMP

Accommodation in deluxe safari tents, all meals, local transport and activities led by knowledgeable and enthusiastic naturalists are available at Koshi Camp which is centrally located on the eastern edge of Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. The Reserve is one of the finest birding sites in Asia. Regularly recorded species include Spot-billed

Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Lesser Adjutant Stork *Leptoptilos dubius*, Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*, Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis* and Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striatus*. Contact: Koshi Camp Nature Safari Tours, PO Box 21016, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal. Tel. 00977 1 429521, Fax 00977 1 439331. e-mail [birdlife@mos.com.np](mailto:birdlife@mos.com.np)



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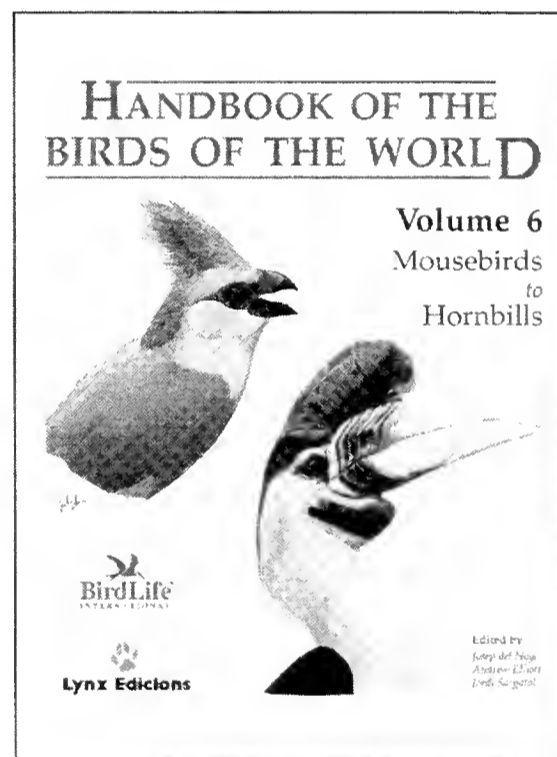
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Whilst the Editor is always pleased to discuss possible contributions with potential authors, and to advise on preparation, it would be helpful if the following guidelines could be adhered to:

1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey and W. Duckworth (1996) *An annotated checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region*.

Any tables to accompany articles should be prepared on separate pieces of paper, and be thoroughly checked. Titles of tables should be self-explanatory. Diagrams should be clearly drawn, in ink, ideally 15 cm wide and 11 cm high. References should be cited in the order in which they appear during the paper in the same style used in this Bulletin.

It would be helpful if two copies of each contribution could be submitted, and also if possible the text submitted on a computer disk, ideally in Microsoft Word, in either PC or Macintosh format.

2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.
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